University of Alberta

Liminality and Shipwreck in Italian-Canadian Literature

by

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Canada

Abstract

In this thesis I would like to discuss Canada's representation of the 'cultural mosaic' and how it compares to the experiences of Italian-Canadians living in Canada. In the first chapter I will examine individual experiences, which are indicative of larger, more common patterns, primarily through the novels of two Italian-Canadian authors, Peter Oliva and Caterina Edwards. There are many parallels between the displacement and marginality of the immigrant characters described in these novels and 'liminality' – a threshold state – which is explained in detail by anthropologist Victor Turner. Chapter Two will be an exploration of the various images of seafaring and shipwreck that aptly describe the emigration/immigration processes, experiences, and outcomes, which differ greatly from the 'American Dream' and 'cultural mosaic' ideals. Finally, in the third and concluding chapter, I will examine the position, direction, and role of Italian-Canadian literature in Canada, drawing again on Turner's 'liminality' and images of seafaring and shipwreck.

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Introduction

Canada is touted, both officially and unofficially, as a multicultural nation – a 'cultural mosaic' that celebrates diversity and rejects the whitewashing melting pot of its southern neighbour. However, despite this anti-racist rhetoric, a multitude of complexities and contradictions may be hidden beneath this seemingly inclusive policy. One commentator in the 'Report of Racial Equality in the Arts at the Canada Council' observes, "Because multiculturalism uses the rhetoric of inclusion it cannot properly address the politics of exclusion" (Creighton-Kelly 4). The strength of the official voice, declaring Canada a multicultural haven, supported by self-promoting media, politics, and literature, leaves little space or opportunity for the naysayer. What then claims to protect our multiplicity of differences and histories may become, instead, reductive and neutralizing. William Anselmi and Kosta Gouliamos, in their book *Elusive Margins*, argue that "Ethnicity is relegated to the category of folklore, tongue-burning foods, document, the 'other' or 'different'." This applies to the Canadian literary cannon as well, where ethnic literatures have been repeatedly and systematically excluded. Anselmi and Gouliamos continue to say: "As an example, consider the polarization that occurs between national literature(s) and ethnic writing, in which the ethnic element is considered a means of existential expression rather than having socio-cultural value" (15).

Indeed, Canada has promoted a literary elite for many years, led by writers such as Margaret Attwood and Robertson Davies, often at the cost of excluding

other, diverse voices. Writer and critic, Antonio D'Alfonso, describes this sort of censorship as "...the silencing of 'non-mainstream' works and the 'recognition' of others, for what is 'mainstream canonicity' if not the artificial repetition of names and lifestyles" (D'Alfonso 18). However, despite the uphill battle to be recognized and legitimized, ethnic literatures in Canada have found diverse means for self-expression, rather than disappearing in the face of adversity. For Italian-Canadian literature, this process began largely in 1978, with the publication of the first Italian-Canadian anthology of poetry written in English: *Roman Candles.* Since then, a growing number of Italian-Canadian authors have produced and published works, some even receiving literary awards and recognition. For example, both Nino Ricci and Fulvio Caccia have won the prestigious Governor General Award for their work. Through a variety of literary means, Italian-Canadians have been able to reclaim, and share with others, their history and experiences in Canada. In this thesis I would like to explore, through an examination of selected Italian-Canadian novels, these experiences and the processes of immigration and displacement, which often stand in sharp contrast to the 'cultural mosaic' ideal. In doing so, I will also refer to the studies of Victor Turner on the subject of 'liminality' – a state characterized by the 'threshold' – which is representative of the position of many who have undergone the migrant experience. Perhaps an introductory note will further illustrate this correlation:

Victor Turner (1920 - 1983), a student of literature in his early years and, later, an anthropologist, dedicated much of his studies to the ambiguous phase in a rite of passage called 'liminality'. Turner based his work largely on the theories

of French folklorist, Arnold VanGennep, who proposed three general stages in a rite of passage, occurring at either an individual or group level: Firstly, the preliminal, or 'separation' phase, involves the detachment of an individual or group from an earlier fixed point in a social structure or a set of cultural conditions. Secondly, in the marginal, or 'liminal' phase, upon which Turner focuses his research, the state of the subject is ambiguous, and this realm contains few to none of the attributes of the previous or coming stages. In the third, postliminal, or 'reaggregation' phase, the subject returns to a relatively stable state and is once again privilege to certain rights and obligations (Turner, Ritual 94). Turner dedicates considerable time to the second, elusive 'threshold' stage, from his studies of rituals of African tribes, to his analysis of the conflictual 1960's and 70's and practices of certain religious groups in early and modern times.

The three-stage process that both VanGennep and Turner support generally unfolds in a sequential and linear manner: For example, the man who is chosen to become the next chief of an African tribe is first removed from his fellow tribesmen. Then, he remains physically and socially isolated for a period, often not allowed to speak and subjected to rituals meant to challenge and abase him. Finally, having proven himself in the liminal phase, he is reunited with the tribe and granted new honours and privileges (100, 101, 105). Often, Turner suggests, these rites of passage are related to status elevation: "The implication is that for an individual to go higher on the status ladder, he must go lower than the status ladder" (170). This mode of thinking, explored in diverse situations by

Victor Turner, also applies to the ideology behind the immigrant 'American Dream': the quest to better one's life by leaving their home and passing through a period of challenge and adaptation to eventually be rewarded with success beyond what they could have ever achieved in their homeland. Peter Oliva writes of this allure in his novel *Drowning in Darkness*, in which a young, Italian woman is seduced by the 'American Dream' in a series of letters from her Italian-Canadian suitor:

> Other times Pep sent bubble gum instead of flowers with his letters and Sera's family chewed to the sound of Canadian stories…Sera imagining the fortune of marrying a coal-miner in America, and all the nieces and nephews imagining the bubble gum found in the coal-mines of America. Everyone knew that America was a place for the *fortunati*. *Trovare America*, they said, find America. The words were the same as saying, find your fortune. And for Sera the meaning was no different. She had never considered leaving Italy but it took less than twelve letters for her to begin sniffing the envelopes to smell America. (28, 29)

In Turner's studies, initiates rarely stray from this three-step process. Although immigrants often expect this same linear progression – "find America…find your fortune" – it is rarely the result.

The immigration experience does, initially, seem to mirror VanGennep's stages in a rite of passage: The emigrating subject is physically separated from his earlier fixed country and culture. There are many striking similarities between the subsequent 'liminal' phase and the displaced subject's experiences and reality in his new country. Here, the status of the subject is ambiguous, as he is no longer part of his previous culture and country and seems to stand at the threshold of the new one. Turner describes the liminal phase as a transition between states,

referring to 'transition' as "...a process, a becoming, and in the case of *rites de passage* even a transformation..." (Turner, Forest 94). Indeed, often the immigrant is hoping, through this process, for a "transformation" of lifestyle and opportunities. These parallels, however, are interrupted before the smooth arrival of the third, 'reaggregation' phase, when the subject is supposed to be reincorporated into society with a set, often elevated, status, and receive new rights and responsibilities. Although the idea of movement is implicit in Turner's definition, he also recognizes that there are people or groups who remain in this threshold stage, such as monks or travellers. Likewise, for a variety of factors and reasons, there are both displaced individuals and ethnic groups who remain in a similar position in their new country: in a stagnant state, eternally on the threshold. On the other hand, there are circumstances in which resolution is inevitable, in one form or another, and this liminal, threshold state implodes, bringing a variety of outcomes. Whatever these outcomes may be, they rarely resemble VanGennep's tidy definition and ideal description.

Whether by choice or circumstance, the liminal stage is, at times, brought to collapse before reaching the safe harbour of the third, 'reaggregation' stage. The precarious stability offered by the liminal stage as a part of a sequence may succumb to a more dynamic force. The symbol of the shipwreck and other seafaring metaphors are fitting in such a circumstance: The ship, which offers an extension of stable, dry land, travels over uncertain waters, destined for a safe port or harbour. Some ships arrive safely, as intended. Some stray, wander, or remain unmoving while their destination remains indefinitely elusive. Finally, others

succumb to the dynamic and tumultuous shipwreck, in which the momentary stability offered by the ship is destroyed and some kind of resolution is brought to pass. The shipwreck motif offers an apt metaphor to explore diverse aspects of Italian-Canadian literature as well as an alternative to VanGennep's linear and predictable sequence in a rite of passage.

Finally, referring again to Turner's 'liminality' and the seafaring metaphors, I would like to examine the position, direction, and role of Italian-Canadian literature in Canadian society in general. As a minority literature, it currently sits in a liminal position in comparison to the mainstream canon. Italian-Canadian literature may be examined through several of liminality's key characteristics, including 'exclusion', 'silence', and certain 'subversive powers', to name a few. Furthermore, images and metaphors of seafaring and shipwreck are once again relevant, as this literature and its writers may sometimes experience a lack of wind, the peril of drowning, and the need for survival techniques. However, like the analysis of individual liminal entities, there is no 'one' port or well-defined moment of reaggregation; to be true to the multilayered and multifaceted nature of ethnic writing, its expression, definition, and future course cannot be done justice with only one possible outcome or answer.

The literary sources that form the basis for my thesis are, firstly, the novels of Caterina Edwards and Peter Oliva, two Italian-Canadian authors. These novels provide ample opportunity to explore, develop, and illustrate the ideas of separation, liminality, and shipwreck. Caterina Edwards' *The Lion's Mouth* tells of the journey of a woman who emigrates from Venice to the Alberta prairies as a

child and subsequently tries to come to terms with her dual identity. Her novella, *Becoming Emma*, is the story of a twice-displaced woman, Aida Avendemis, who tries to shed her ethnic roots to conform to what she perceives as an American ideal. Peter Oliva's *Drowning in Darkness* focuses on the experiences of a young woman lured to Canada by the 'American Dream', who is then left to struggle in an existence characterized by isolation, silence and displacement. His novel, *The City of Yes*, provides the alternate perspective of an Italian-Canadian man displaced in Japan, who encounters linguistic and cultural challenges but in quite a different context. This novel may also be read as a displaced metaphor of an immigrant living in Canada, as both the narrator and the author are of Italian-Canadian origin and may be transposing their experiences onto another country and culture. The shipwreck metaphor is explored in-depth in Hans Blumenberg's essay, 'Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm of a Metaphor for Existence'. Here, Blumenberg explores the plethora of shipwreck and seafaring images and metaphors used by philosophers, writers, politicians, and common people from ancient to modern times. These texts, in addition to works by a variety of Italian-Canadian intellectuals, provide the foundation for the parallels I intend to draw between separation, liminality, and immigration, and the subsequent multiplicity of outcomes, or 'shipwreck'.

Chapter One

Separation and Liminality

'Separation' is the first step in VanGennep's sequence in a rite of passage, as well as the first major step in the emigration process. VanGennep described this stage as "...the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a 'state'), or from both" (Turner, Ritual 94). According to Turner, in this stage, for example, a group of prepubescent, male youth of the Ndembu African tribe would be taken from their families and village and brought to a socially and geographically secluded area – a campsite of sorts – to prepare for a circumcision ceremony (Forest 185).

The protagonists in all four of the aforementioned novels go through a similar, drastic geographical and cultural separation. In *The Lion's Mouth*, Bianca is moved as a child from Venice to a series of small, Alberta towns, as her parents seek the typical immigrant dream of quick financial success in a new land. She describes her first days of separation:

> Leaving Venice for the first time, I confronted ten days crossing the ocean, ten days staring at the limitless waves, three even more endless days on the train. Rock and tree, tree and rock. No houses, no people for hundreds upon hundreds of miles…Leaving Venice, though I was with Mamma and Papa, I felt stripped of family, of friends, of familiar walls and buildings, of proper landscape. I was exposed, alone in the nothingness. (109)

Like Turner's prepubescent youth, Bianca is removed, first physically and then psychologically, from her home and culture, forsaking the comforts of the familiar.

In *Becoming Emma*, Aida and her parents experience a series of separations from their homeland of Latvia. Her parents are initially driven from Latvia to Germany as refugees, where Aida is born. From Germany, they emigrate to America, still mourning their abandoned homeland:

> When anyone asked, as they often did, 'So, where are you from?' her father would answer, "We came from Latvia, tragic Latvia, violated Latvia, and now we are here. Americans, the great melting pot, yes?" But at home he would repeat, "We are always in our hearts, always Latvians." And her mother would say, "The country lives; not there, here: Latvia." (82)

Within the United States they experience another shift when Aida's father obtains his first well-paying job, and they move from poor, ethnically-diverse Brooklyn to an upscale neighbourhood, where Aida first attempts to mold an identity separate

from that of her past. Aida experiences yet another separation when she gets married and moves to Canada, where she longs for her former, American self and she continues to try to eradicate her Latvian identity.

The protagonist in Peter Oliva's *The City of Yes* happily separates himself from his homeland and familiar culture, as he is dissatisfied with his mediocre existence in Canada. He actively seeks separation, enticed by the image of the exotic and the prospect of a better, more fulfilling experience abroad:

> In the winter of 1993 – while employed by a local gym to erase squash-ball marks from the corners of four square walls, day after day – I decided to put my English degree to better use and find some kind of work abroad…To my ear, Japan was an entirely different word. I wanted to leave Canada, to break out of my cramped status quo, and the Orient seemed like the farthest place on earth that I could imagine. They needed English teachers, I'd heard. They paid well. (11, 14)

The narrator chooses the obscure city of Saitama, Japan, on virtue of its remoteness and sure lack of western ties: "I was thrilled that no map listed my town's name. In fact, the largest city was half-hour away, by bus. I was to live in a nondescript suburb of Kumagaya city, completely surrounded by ricefields" (15).

The protagonist in *Drowning in Darkness,* Serafina, agrees to leave her native land of southern Italy not out of dissatisfaction with her life there, but out of fascination for a life of promise in 'America'. She arrives in the mountainous community of Alberta's Crowsnest Pass to marry an Italian-Canadian coalminer. In addition to the geographical isolation of this community within Alberta and its

stark differences to her Mediterranean homeland, they and other Italian immigrants live in a forgotten and neglected corner of the town:

> They lived in this house, a cottage really, at the far corner of the street, in practically the furthest corner of the town (at the bottom of a bluff), backed up against an alley and a grassy hill, in what has always been called Dagotown…a name that covered the real one so completely nobody remembered what they first called the community…The house looked soft and blurred, worn around the edges by ancient gritty winds that blew coal dust from the mine… There was a miniature veranda, too small for more than a chair, that cut a wobbly line from the house to the street. No sidewalk. No people. (20, 21)

Serafina and the other three protagonists experience a "detachment," as described by Turner and VanGennep, from an earlier fixed point in a social structure and set of cultural conditions. At this initial 'separation' stage, the process of leaving one's homeland and immigrating to a new land and the processual rituals described by these two men seem to mirror one another.

Upon completion of the 'separation' phase, the subject enters what is described by Turner and VanGennep as the 'liminal' phase. Turner, in particular, studied the many varied aspects of this ambiguous 'threshold' period. He explains loosely that in "…the intervening 'liminal' period, the characteristics of the ritual subject (the 'passenger') are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state" (Turner, Ritual 94). In this state, for example, all Ndembu youths participating in the circumcision ceremony are seen as equal, regardless of their previous rank: "The chief's son receives the same treatment as a slave, but the slave does not become the chief's son" (Forest 193). They undergo unfamiliar preparation rituals and are

completely subject to those in positions of authority over them. In Western culture, a similar example may be seen when members of the British Royal Family send their male youths, on the verge of adulthood, to spend a period of time fulfilling military or community service, often far from the comfort and familiarity of home. For example, in 2000, Prince William, Prince Charles' eldest son and second in line to the throne, spent three months teaching English and building community facilities in towns in southern Chile. During this period, he lived in the same quarters and conditions as other volunteers; he participated in physical labour, and was not distinguished in any way from his peers. The conditions and trials the subject experiences in this phase are supposed to prepare him for the greater responsibility and elevated status of the final, 'reaggregation' phase.

Although circumstances may vary greatly between those passing through a 'liminal' phase, Turner identifies several key characteristics that appear commonly during this ambiguous period. As seen in the abovementioned examples, individuals passing through this phase often experience a stripping of status, defying normal or previous classifications. They are normally secluded, silenced, and structurally and/or physically invisible. Symbols that represent these subjects include those of birth or death. They can be viewed as dangerous, inauspicious and polluting by those who have not gone through this process themselves. In this unclassified state, they are often re-named or de-named. Also, a common, prevalent assumption is that the liminal entity becomes a 'blank slate', or is ground down to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional

powers. Finally, despite the seemingly voiceless and passive nature of the liminal phase, liminal persons contain certain 'powers of the weak', their lack of status allowing for subversion in the face of established norms. In this realm, where aspects of the previous stage and the future stage hold no bearing, new possibilities, configurations and ideas may arise, unfettered by pre-established societal expectations and influences.

In his book, *The Ritual Process*, Victor Turner explains how liminal entities are often stripped of status and enter an ambiguous realm: "…[T]hese persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space…[T]hey are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (95). He uses the example of the Kumukindyila ritual among the Ndembu, which occurs when a new tribe chief is chosen. In the liminal phase of this ritual, the would-be chief and his wife are dressed in ragged clothing and called by the same general term, meaning 'initiand', to render them anonymous and stress their lack of rank (102). In *The Anthropology of Performance,* he explains that liminal phases and states "…often are more about the doffing of masks, the stripping of statuses, the renunciation of roles, the demolishing of structures, than their putting on and keeping on" (107). This same example is seen in the abovementioned Ndembu circumcision ceremony, where the chief's son is considered equal to all the other novices and they to him.

Those immigrating to a new land may experience a similar "stripping of status," regardless of what their position or social ties were in their homeland.

This lack of societal recognition, particularly in comparison to what they may have previously experienced, only works to accentuate their displacement in their new environment. For example, although Bianca in *The Lion's Mouth* is initially too young to fully appreciate what her family's status had been in Italy, her mother openly laments this loss when trying to establish a new life in Canada:

> Mamma soon found staying home in the latest bare house in the latest bare suburb intolerable…Her hands would shake. Each time she served up soup or poured a glass of milk, some slipped down the sides. She began working as a waitress several evenings a week. She did not tell your mother or Aunt Elsa. Perhaps she was a bit ashamed. She was the educated one, and now she was reduced to this. (110)

Bianca's mother, Mrs. Mazzin, partakes of the old world's view in her class consciousness. However, the system of classes is far less overt in Canada and is generally neutralized by Canadian culture at large. This is unacceptable to Mrs. Mazzin, and she continues to fight against this stripping of status, or "doffing of masks," determined to protect herself and her family from losing the memory of the respect and social rank they once held in Italy. In her struggle against this anonymous aspect of the liminal phase, she rejects all things Canadian, as well as the other immigrants whose background she would have previously scorned in Italy. "'Do you want to become one of those Canadians?'" her mother would ask her, "…which meant, do you want to be without style, without manners, without sense?" (113). Although this does nothing to secure her a respectable social position in her new country, it does succeed in alienating her daughter, Bianca, and convincing her that her mother lives in a fantasy world. It is only upon returning to Italy, as an older child, that she understands the complex social

connections and the status that her mother left behind: "…[D]uring my summers in Venice, I would be surprised over and over to find that she could identify subtle shadings, that her methods of evaluation could apply. Even her stories about her younger self (the friendships with the aristocrats, the many suitors) would be confirmed…" (122).

This stripping of status and entering a realm of the anonymous also appears in Edwards' *Becoming Emma*, exemplified in particular by Aida's parents' expatriate Latvian friends. For this group of adults, their lives and roles in society had seemed secure back in Latvia, and their displacement in the United States shakes their sense of identity and stresses instability as the norm, where once it was a given:

> They were children of the middle class: comfortably, comfortably preparing themselves for their proper future. Without a thought, they'd been sure of who they were, of what was theirs. They had been aware, who was not, of the clouds on the horizon. They'd prepared for a rain, a hailstorm, not the deluge. Now they were out of place, insecure, confused, but dogmatic. All was reversed: what was, was gone; settled youth flipped into an adolescent middle age. (88)

Aida witnesses the emotional and confusing social gatherings between her parents and their Latvian peers, at first with curiosity and later with revulsion. Their evenings together are often sentimental and nostalgic, mixed with overindulged drinking and tearful outbursts, angry debates and excessive patriotic displays. Likewise, her father, and subsequently the entire family, experiences a stripping of status in their move to America, as he spends years employed in factory assembly lines and as a janitor while actually educated as an engineer. In all of

these instances, this doffing of masks and stripping of status only works to accentuate their sense of displacement, loss, and confusion in their new environment.

In addition to defying classification, and therefore being structurally invisible in society, liminal entities are also typically secluded, silenced, and physically invisible. Victor Turner explains in *The Forest of Symbols*:

> The subject of passage ritual is, in the liminal period, structurally, if not physically, 'invisible'. As members of society, most of us see only what we expect to see, and what we expect to see is what we are conditioned to see when we have learned the definitions and classifications of our culture. A society's secular definitions do not allow for the existence of a not-boy-not-man, which is what a novice in a puberty rite is (if he can be said to be anything). (95)

The initiates in the circumcision rite, for example, who fall under this ambiguous definition of not-boy-not-man, are removed from their fellow tribesmen while they are still considered boys and brought to a secluded area where this ritual is performed. They are not returned to their tribe until the rite has been completed and they are then considered men. Also, they are commonly expected to remain silent and compliant to those in a position of power over them. In *The Ritual Process*, Turner explains that liminal entities are "...excluded from the spheres of everyday life...or rendered inaudible by rules of silence" (169). He describes, for example, how the chief-elect in the liminal stage must endure, in humility and silence, a torrent of verbal abuse from those initiating him and anyone in the community who wishes to participate (101).

In Oliva's *Drowning in Darkness*, the entire community of Italian-Canadian coalminers and their families is portrayed as hovering indefinitely in seclusion, silence, and without rank. This is clearly seen in the aforementioned description of the town's Italian district, which lies in the farthest corner of the town in an area nicknamed "the swamp." Oliva describes the crowded squalor:

> This was the Italian district. Dagotown. A group of houses built tight, squeezed into twenty-five-foot lots, all of them one to four feet apart and slightly angled, spilling foundation corners and room splinters into their neighbours' properties like frustrated elbows fighting for an armrest. Rainwater fell on one house, slid down the walls of another and was bailed into a third. Coal dust from each stove chimney mushroomed and joined the collective black billows hovering over the street and the nearby mine tipple. And a sneeze from one home brought a muttered *salute*, or more often an unconscious wipe of the nose, from its neighbour...(19)

The name, "Dagotown," also indicates that they are excluded from mainstream society and branded as the 'other.' The use of racial slurs allows people to exploit the differences between themselves and ethnic populations and distance themselves from any human commonalities.

In addition to being physically contained in a remote area of the town, away from the eyes of the residents considered more powerful and prominent, the working practices described by the characters depict an attitude of expendability towards the ethnic community. These immigrants and their families, in their liminal, undefined state, are treated as consumable and of little worth by the mine owners, although the majority has kept the mine running for generations. Oliva writes of how the owners manipulate the idea of the 'American Dream' of financial success to continue luring younger generations into this dead-end cycle:

"More coal, more money for you. More money for you, more promotions for me. Don't you have a son in Junior High, bring him down, I'll hire him. He can buck coal. You can leave the Crowsnest and go back to the old country a rich man" (56). Oliva goes on to describe that after a lethal explosion in a mine, "…anybody left standing got a bonus, his pockets so full he couldn't walk" (56). The cycle of being consumed for cheap labour – a never-ending resource of sorts – is made possible by the physical and structural invisibility of the Italian community. Their lives, and deaths, have little impact on the greater community, and their compliance is bought by the promise of success and escape.

Drowning in Darkness contains other images that represent the voiceless, and subsequent powerless, state of the Italian immigrant community, which remains indefinitely on the threshold of greater community of the Crowsnest Pass. One of the most powerful images that illustrate this point is that of the dismembered corpse. This allegory is created by the character of Sunderd, the town doctor, whose job it is to clean, reassemble and identify the shattered bodies of miners after an explosion:

> The man Sunderd thought the hand belonged to was in pieces, looking very comfortable – for the first time in his life – lying in the bottom of a tub. He finally fit. If that wasn't really his hand or leg, he didn't complain. No explanation was necessary. In a way, the man was sharing himself with another man so completely that his kindness was beyond words. His silence was expected and deserved. (57, 58)

Here, as Sunderd points out, the immigrant miner, who represents one of many killed in this blast, does not fit into his surroundings as a whole, complete being. It is only in pieces, and in death, that he finally fits comfortably into his

environment. Also, the expendability and lack of individuality of the miners is highlighted by the fact that one miner's body parts may be easily replaced with another's. Finally, as with the chief-elect, the miner is "expected" to remain in a silent state. It is assumed that he will not complain about his situation and manipulation at the hands of those in a more powerful position. These immigrant miners and their families, as liminal persons, live in a silent and powerless state, akin to being already dead.

Drowning in Darkness contains other references, on a more individual level, of liminal characters within this Italian-Canadian community who lack language and possibility of expression. The character of Pep, for example, is representative of those miners who have consigned themselves to accept the limited offerings of their liminal status. Pep's lack of language is made manifest early in his marriage, in his attempts to communicate with his wife: "Her typical monologue was short and answered a question Pep never asked, yet was somehow made to regret…A healthy nod of agreement was his best and only real defence" (31). A man of few words even when Sera is with him, Pep becomes even more reclusive and solitary in the years after her disappearance. He is portrayed as living a sort of silent death while still alive, demonstrated by the fact that he has already dug his own grave and erected a tombstone with his name on it. Celi, Pep's fellow miner and friend, comments: "And he did Sera's and his own goddamned grave the same bloody way. Only the concrete over his grave is just bordered, you know, waiting for the words" (118). This statement also implies that Pep will remain without words, and therefore silent, until his death.

Another image of wordlessness appears upon the disappearance of the character of Sera. While she is certainly not content existing as a liminal entity in an environment that she describes as being "...black and white, with varied levels of dusty grey," she is nonetheless trapped in the same existence as Pep (81). Because of her immigrant status, her sex, and her socioeconomic level, she exists in a voiceless state in her society. She remains almost constantly in seclusion; she passes her time alone, walking in remote places and losing herself in dreams of her Italian past. Despite her frustrations and dissatisfaction with her situation, she wields no power to change it. Any expression of unhappiness is neither particularly acknowledged, nor does it affect anything. When Sera finally quietly leaves Pep on a winter's night, her tracks in the snow represent her voiceless state: "Nearest the house there was no snow at all, so Sera's tracks began not at the door but in the middle of the lawn. Narrow slices, like empty parentheses, slashed smoothly through the snow. Her footprints disappeared under the blanket and only the parentheses remained" (178). Parentheses, which would normally surround words, are left empty; even Sera's final statement is devoid of language, and her disappearance is left a mystery to the entire community.

In *The City of Yes*, Oliva weaves two coinciding stories of travel to Japan: one of the narrator's quest to discover the Orient while working as an English teacher and another of the experiences of nineteenth-century North American explorer Ranald MacDonald. MacDonald, who may be considered a liminal entity before ever arriving in Japan, experiences this state even more so upon his arrival, where he is promptly treated as invisible and is imprisoned to ensure his

seclusion. MacDonald defies classification even in North America: He is the child of a Chinook Indian princess and a Hudson's Bay clerk, and his nationality, either Canadian or American, is unclear. He stages his own shipwreck off the shores of Japan in the hope of living amongst its people, believing that the Japanese people somehow share the same blood as his mother's native people. Despite his high hopes for cultural and linguistic exchange, and a measure of self-discovery, MacDonald's arrival in Japan violates their no-foreigners law. As he is not supposed to exist there, much like the not-boy-not-man in the puberty rite, the locals go to extreme measures to deny his appearance:

> When MacDonald came ashore, on the island of Rishiri, he was greeted by a half-dozen fishermen. The men tried to push him away from the beach and erase his tracks in the sand, but MacDonald faltered to one knee, fell into the surf, and left his boat to drift…MacDonald was made to sit while one of the men ran up the beach. Within minutes he came back with another man…In Japanese, then Portuguese, the man in blue gave MacDonald the words "Come, come." MacDonald walked through a white town – white because his passage through the village was curtained by sheets held up by small brown hands. He walked a quarter-mile within this whiteness and never saw a face. The most he saw were wooden sandals and – above the white sheets – two rows of fingers without thumbs…(108)

Although this is an extreme example, it may be viewed metaphorically as how people respond to the unknown, or unidentifiable, liminal entity introduced into their community. MacDonald, in addition to this initial rejection, is then imprisoned – secluded and made invisible – for the remainder of his time in Japan, in order to shield the general public from his intrusion and existence.

The character of Bianca in *The Lion's Mouth* passes through a period of silence and seclusion as a child, sparked mainly by her linguistic awkwardness in English, versus her native Italian, and her inability to blend in with her peers. She describes how her differences isolated her:

> I took my turn at reading aloud and hearing, between my hesitant words, half-muffled giggles, looking up to see the exchange of knowing glances, the circle closing against me. 'Listen to her. *Dis.* Listen to her.' Round and round – laughs, whispers, secrets, gifts, birthdays – *shared.* I was left outside, watching. I stood alone on the cold playground. The other girls skipped by the school. I edged towards them. Maybe I could slip in, blend imperceptably into the magic circle. But when I was standing silently beside them, their eyes shifted towards me. Their skipping songs shifted smoothly from 'Spanish dancers do the kicks' to 'We don't want no DP's.' (112, 113)

Not only is Bianca silenced by her inability to speak like her peers, she is isolated and made to feel invisible in their presence. Also, her other efforts to conform to her peers are thwarted by her mother's insistence that she 'remain Italian'. For example, while she longs to wear the same jeans and ski jackets that other Canadian children wear, her mother insists she wear woollen dresses and sensible leather shoes from Italy. She is also not permitted to participate in certain social functions that her mother deems inappropriate for an Italian child. Furthermore, as a recent immigrant, her father works long hours away from home. All of these circumstances contribute to Bianca's state of seclusion and silence, both within her family and her community. To survive, Bianca exists in her own imaginary world: "I withdrew to the fairy tale world I found in my favourite reading. I populated the gap between myself and everyone else with dwarves, giants, fairies,

and elves…My involved stories filled the silence of the long hours I passed alone" (114).

As Bianca becomes a teenager, she also confronts a degree of voicelessness and isolation by her inability to express herself in her native tongue, Italian, after being shaped by years of English speaking and reading. While she does not feel Canadian, her Canadian influence is betrayed in her Italian speech, and she finds herself displaced between the two nationalities. In speaking to her cousin, Marco, for whom the book is written, she explains the frustration of searching for words, and an acceptance, that elude her: "I remember that summer I began to love you; you always introduced me as *la mia piccola cugina canadese,* my little Canadian cousin, to your friends. And I would protest: 'Canadian. I'm as Venetian as the rest of you.'"(122). Surrounded by the paintings of Longhi in an art gallery, Marco expresses doubts about what he's going to do with his life, and Bianca tries to respond to him:

> All around me Longhi's women: red hair, pale pointed faces, dominating sharp dark eyes. My hair, my face, my eyes, even my round body. Still, when I tried to answer you, the words on my tongue were English. I paused, I stuttered, searched for the Italian equivalents. I was smooth enough with phrases of family and home. But theory, abstract thought, seemed necessarily English, for it was the language in which I read. I stopped in the middle of a sentence… 'I can't quite say what I mean. It's so frustrating,' 'On the contrary.' You had taken my elbow… 'You do very well. Your accent is amazingly close. You can barely tell that you live over there.' Barely. Later I stood in front of the mirror and practised. It was in the movement of my facial muscles and my mouth that I was caught out…The Canadian style, tight and reserved, had been coded into my body and could not be unlearned. (123, 124)

Despite wanting to only be 'Venetian', like her cousin and his friends, her Canadian accent separates her from them and makes her a liminal entity in her place of birth. In addition to her accent, her inability to express complexities and abstract thought in Italian renders her silent, leaving her displaced in both Canada and Italy.

As the liminal entities that Turner discusses are often involved in rituals and ceremonies as part of a transformation process, there are common and reoccurring symbols that often represent them in this ambiguous state. Two of these frequently-appearing symbols are those of birth and death. In *The Forest of Symbols*, Turner explains:

> The structural "invisibility" of liminal *personae* has a twofold character. They are at once no longer classified and not yet classified. In so far as they are no longer classified, the symbols that represent them are, in many societies, drawn from the biology of death, decomposition, catabolism, and other physical processes that have a negative tinge…The other aspect, that they are not yet classified, is often expressed in symbols modelled on processes of gestation and parturition. The neophytes are likened to or treated as embryos, newborn infants, or sucklings by symbolic means…(96)

For example, Turner describes how initiates he witnessed were sometimes buried, forced to lie in a burial position or stained black (96). In other instances, Turner explains, "…death and growth may be represented by the same tokens, for example, by huts and tunnels that are at once tombs and wombs…by nakedness (which is at once the mark of a newborn infant and a corpse prepared for burial)…" (Forest 99). In addition to the straightforward symbols of life and death, a state of being both at once is also known to represent liminal entities.

According to Turner, "The essential feature of these symbolizations is that the neophytes are neither living nor dead from one aspect, and both living and dead from another. Their condition is one of ambiguity and paradox, a confusion of all the customary categories" (97). Likewise, in these novels the marginal, immigrant characters, their community, or situations involving them are often surrounded by images of birth, death, and an ambiguous state of undead.

Drowning in Darkness, as it tells the story of a silent and marginal people, is rife with images of death. Throughout the novel, death imagery surrounds the mine itself, as it is the reason for the poor quality of life and often early death of most of this immigrant community. In its opening pages, while describing the methane swirling around the miners and the groaning of the timbers, Oliva uses the image of the miners being continually chased by death, in the form of a skeleton: "Foot by foot the men hammer and wedge their timbers into frames and cross-sections, following Celi into the seam as if escaping a wooden skeleton that forever chases them" (9). Also, Oliva describes the rumblings before an explosion like those of a hungry being, obviously satiated by the subsequent slaughter: "…Pep heard the rumbling that night, like a stomach's groan for food…" (49). In another instance, Sunderd, the doctor, tells the story of a baboon being captured by a rope around its neck. Then, the image of the noose appears again on the next page in reference to a miner in the mine: As Celi is trapped in the mine and awaiting a rescue that never comes, he hears "…a loud creak, like a rope's knot being tightened" (114).

This novel also contains several references to liminal characters, or their community, in an ambiguous undead, or 'living dead' state. In addition to the aforementioned graves and gravestones, which Pep digs and erects while still alive, the use of intertextuality on Oliva's part creates another image of the living dead. He describes in detail the items found in Pep's basement: "Broken chairs, paper bags full of screws, stacks of *National Geographics*, curtains, blankets, bottles and wooden casks that would rival a Roman catacomb full of Amontillado" (148). The "catacomb full of Amontillado" refers to Edgar Allan Poe's short story, 'The Cask of Amontillado', in which Montresor lures Fortunato to the deep recesses of a catacomb and buries him alive. Other instances in the novel also refer to Pep as being more dead than alive. As an older man, after Sera has been gone for several years, Oliva describes Pep's life as a banal and lonely routine: "He didn't eat breakfast until later, at the café, after he'd packed a lunch, put on his sweat-stained hat and dragged his shadow downtown" (174). At this point, Pep is portrayed as more shadow than man: something in the form of a being but devoid of flesh, blood, and life.

In addition to the references of death surrounding Pep, Oliva also repeatedly uses ghost imagery in reference to the character of Sera. For example, when Sunderd encounters Sera on one of her frequent and lengthy walks, she doesn't acknowledge his presence and glides past him, as a ghost would: "Sera didn't register anything he'd said. She glided quietly past him, walking softly past the wash-house, past Sunderd's trailing voice. She moved smoothly through the tipple's thick shadow, all the way to the mine entrance..." (155). As Sunderd

watches her from the wash-house, he observes that "...Sera looked exactly like someone who was haunted" (157). Then, on the same encounter, he watches her walk back towards him: "Her green skirt rippled slightly as she walked, as she blew by his window the same way he'd seen her walk towards the mine entrance. Her feet barely stirred the dust" (163). Also, described as someone who loses herself in dreams, Sera is paralleled with a miner who drowns in the mine by breathing methane and then rolling into a puddle:

> Some, whom Celi knew, drowned in the mine, then were carried out by rescuers who put them back into more proper graves called hallowed ground. The earth is always just as coal-ridden and rocky as the ground they came out of, but the short, white fence that surrounds all of their graves keeps them together, corralled and quiet, for another, later escape. While other men may sleep five feet away and are able to walk out on their own legs, the drowned miner just keeps dreaming. (88)

Likewise, Sera also continuously escapes the Crowsnest Pass in dreams:

> Italy seeped into Sera's present. She could imagine the Mediterranean washing away the Crowsnest and her life there, and when she gave in to those thoughts her wishes broke free, flooding her dreams. She talked with her dead father, with her friends and family who rolled toward her at night and rolled away by daybreak. She felt the shadows of her past floating through her and over her like a cloud's gentle, cool eclipse of the sun. And in this way she could escape the weak Canadian sun, its frail eye, escape the dust. (66, 67)

Here, Oliva also blurs the line between dreams, reality, life, and death, as dead men are said to dream, and Sera's dreams become her reality. Finally, at the end of the novel, Oliva makes one last reference to Sera already being a ghost by

comparing her to a ghost she herself saw earlier in the novel. Sera watches the ghost of an unknown woman move silently across her basement and disappear:

> ...Sera would have forgotten about her completely if she hadn't seen, upon leaving the basement, the trail her coat had made in the basement's dust. It appeared to have swung slightly from side to side, cleaning the floor as the woman walked. And the swipes or grooves that the coat left were like empty parentheses slashed into the floor, waiting to be filled. (136)

We see this same reference to empty parentheses regarding Sera at the end of the novel, referred to in a previously-mentioned quote, when she leaves Pep and disappears. Oliva consistently intermingles these images of death with descriptions of Sera throughout the novel, and, again, accentuates the issue of silence in comparing her to a ghost.

Drowning in Darkness also portrays the miners, as a group, existing in an ambiguous undead state. This applies to the example of the dismembered miner, who cannot possibly be alive given his physical state, but who, according to Sunderd, looks comfortable, doesn't complain, and is kindly sharing himself with another miner. Also, from their birth, the babies born to poor, immigrant families – who become the future miners – are described as "ghosts," already dead at birth. Sunderd, the doctor who delivers most of these babies, recalls:

> He'd taken miners out of better places than coal-mines. When the parents were living wherever they could, he usually took them from chicken coops – babies more hatched than born. Some of the parents, being new immigrants, were that threadbare...At a loss for baby clothes, Sunderd wrapped more than one future miner in sheets of gauze, bundling them up into little ghosts for their new Canadian fathers. (162)

In addition to the animal-like conditions in which theses children are born, which also reduces their humanity, the sure, early death they face in the mines, by virtue of their marginal status, spells death even at their moment of birth.

Oliva also uses language and imagery relating to death when describing the miners who technically survive an explosion in the mine: "...[T]he ones who live to see the outside of a mine blast literally walk out and never look back...Every one of them is haunted. And every one of them seems to haunt the Pass..." (89). Later in the novel, Sunderd explains the cold, undead state of the survivors, as he himself relates to their silent and withdrawn state:

> Even if they lived through those blasts they always emerged from the tunnels more cold than warm. Something happened to them while they waited in the dark, something far different from just a long shift in the mine. When they were rescued they all seemed to keep to themselves...He didn't know why they did that, but he thought he'd felt the same kind of loneliness, the same need to keep moving, without explanation...When he'd moved out to his shack in the woods he might have escaped the mine but he'd lost something too. He'd abandoned something distinctly human. (162, 163)

As the mine causes these men to abandon their humanity, while they continue physically living, it is easy to see why Oliva draws parallels between them and the undead. Finally, even after the miners die, and particularly if they die in a mine blast, they are unable to rest peacefully. In addition to the previous reference to buried miners escaping through dreams, Sunderd describes the involuntary jerking of the corpses like the movements of a fitful sleep:

> He'd patched men together, or straightened them out, tying their jaws shut with strings that resembled slingshots, fastening the lines in careful knots behind the miners' heads...Their arms were tied together, resting

> across their stomachs, as were their legs, to stop their hips from splaying out. It wasn't just for the coffins' sake Sunderd did that; sometimes the men jerked or moved around if he didn't tie them down properly… They could twitch, shudder even, as if from a dream, fall off the edge of a table and almost wake up, cursing him for not tying better knots. (158)

Interestingly, also, in this quote is the aspect that the miners don't want to wake up, preferring the escape through dreams in death to the life they left. As the mine is the inevitable life and future for these liminal entities, and the mine means inevitable death – both physical and emotional – Oliva's repeated use of death imagery is fitting.

Edwards' *The Lion's Mouth* contains images of both birth and death. The "gestation and parturition" that Turner mentions are represented in Bianca's emigration to Canada. Bianca describes her life and surroundings in Italy like a womb – warm, nurturing, and safe: "Italy was enclosure, cocooning, the comfort of a secure place among the cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents. There was always a surfeit of noise, of concern, of advice…that closeness, carefulness, the insulating blanket of protectiveness…" (108, 109). This description sits in sharp contrast to her initial experiences in Canada, which may be compared to a child leaving the womb and confronting cold, confusion, and the unknown. After her journey to Canada, or the "parturition," Bianca describes her first impressions of the wide open spaces of Canada as being "desolate," and feeling "exposed and alone" (109). Also, like a newborn infant, she is unable to speak or express herself through language. Then, her acquisition of English comes slowly, and she struggles with comprehension and pronunciation, similar to a young child

learning to speak for the first time. As she matures, a symbol of death in the form of a skeleton appears, in reference to the old cultural codes and values that Bianca's parents try to impose on her:

> My parents were overprotective. In the face of unfamiliar and therefore suspect customs, they kept me reined in, bound and blinkered. They would not acknowledge that habits and guidelines could have changed in Italy since their youth. They clung to 'their way', but disconnected from the society it expressed, 'their way' shriveled to no more than a dry bone of belief, no more than a skeleton of a once vital form. (159, 160)

Not only are the norms and mores Bianca's parents support unlike those of her current environment, they are also no longer those of a modern Italy. In trying to force her to adhere to a dead form, which is no longer applicable in either Canada or Italy, her parents alienate her from themselves and accentuate her displacement in Canada.

A positive symbol of birth appears at the end of the novel when Bianca completes the writing of her novel, which aids her in coming to terms with her experiences of immigration and displacement. This time, she has not being traumatized by the cold, barren, Canadian winter, having "hibernated" while writing her novel. Her study, and the therapeutic process of writing, has been a warm and safe womb:

> I sit in my book-stuffed study and write…It is late spring. The sun is higher in the sky. The winter passed gently. There was little need this year for armouring oneself in preparation. Besides, I was like a hibernating animal, hiding out here in my little house, noticing now and then the depth of snow, the length of daylight, but turning back always to the words…(266)

After having written her novel, and "exorcised" her dream of Venice, as she puts it, she is able to face her Canadian environment with a new perspective. As the writing of the novel was her gestation period, Bianca's rebirth in Canada begins on one of the final pages of the novel as she declares: "So I begin again my life in this city, this land. City: the place where the citizen is at home. I will, with the others, make this city, imagine it fully" (268).

The City of Yes contains an allegory of struggle and probable death, but one that ends in survival. Here, the narrator gives a detailed account of a confrontation between a spider and two praying mantises, which may be regarded as an allegory for the ability of immigrants to survive in a new environment. Firstly, he begins by intentionally introducing his caged spider, which represents the immigrant, into the seemingly alien, and likely hostile, environment of two praying mantises. He does, from the onset, expect the spider to die: "I usually kept the praying mantises away from the other 'in-house' bugs, but the spider was becoming lethargic of late, and on this particular evening I was sure that a praying mantis could outlive a spider" (238). To his surprise, nothing happens immediately, and he observes a period of mutual inspection and moderate hostility on the part of the mantises, who represent those native to a host country: "By the time I looked in on them they seemed wholly content with their lot, the mantises taking a few threatening swipes at the spider, just for show" (238). Unlike the initial beliefs of the narrator, the spider is not killed immediately, but attempts to make this foreign and hostile environment its home. This is also when the real conflict and resistance begins:

> The spider, large and yellow, with black flecks on her fur, merely crawled at the glass, begging me to let her out. I didn't realize that she was, in fact, going around the cage in circles…But I began to notice that bits of dirt and pebbles were moving about the cage, as if tied to some transparent puppet string. She was spinning! …When I woke up to the sound of the wind at three a.m. the spider was hanging from the top of the cage and three-quarters of my beautiful cage was webbed. Incredibly, the mantises were now rooted to the ground, and I noticed that one was missing an antenna. The spider only had five legs, so I went back to bed. The odds looked rather good. (238)

At this point, the narrator still predicts death for the underdog spider. However, its will to survive is stronger than he expects:

> By eight a.m. the scenario was much the same, except the brown mantis was doubled over, visibly tired and probably dying. Strands of spider webs were gumming his leg joints. Enough, I thought. I felt more affinity for the mantis and I still wanted him to win (at least vicariously) so I fished out the spider with a mug and tried vainly to flush her down the toilet. Even after I added a wad of toilet paper, she just kept coming back, using her (seemingly) ineffective legs and an invisible safety thread. After one more try I finally gave up and let her outside, shooing her down the hallway with a cardboard notepad, until she found her freedom. She'd earned it. (239)

The spider, who the narrator thinks will face an easy death in the mantises' cage and later in the toilet, demonstrates an amazing ability to adapt and survive. Likewise, Oliva displays through this allegory the unexpected strength, adaptability, and will that immigrants demonstrate in leaving their country of origin and trying to build a life in a new, sometimes hostile, country. For example, this will is shown by Bianca, in an abovementioned paragraph, whose strength of imagination rescues her from her lonely and hostile environment by creating and populating the world around her. As with the spider and the

mantises, what should have been an image of death and defeat becomes, instead, one of survival and determination.

Despite the sometimes positive symbols and images that surround liminal entities, they may be viewed as dangerous, inauspicious, and polluting by those who have not undergone this process themselves. Turner, in *The Ritual Process*, explains: "…[T]hat which cannot be clearly classified in terms of traditional criteria of classification, or falls between classificatory boundaries, is almost everywhere regarded as 'polluting' and 'dangerous'" (109). This same ideology is supported by Dr. Mary Douglas in her book *Purity and Danger*, which hypothesizes that what is unclear – as liminal entities are – is therefore seen as unclean. According to Douglas, this attitude "…is a reaction to protect cherished principles and categories from contradiction" (qtd. in Turner, Forest 97). In societies where order and hierarchy are maintained by clear, predicable structures, the undefined nature of liminal entities poses a threat, particularly if others have not had the same experience. In *The Forest of Symbols*, Turner uses a term to describe this reaction, which is often associated with disease and illness and may threaten the well-being of entire populations: "…[L]iminal *personae* nearly always and everywhere are regarding as polluting to those who have never been, so to speak, 'inoculated' against them, through having been themselves initiated into the same state" (97). This reaction of fear, suspicion, and general unease may be seen in these novels as well, as the citizens of the new country – who have not had this same immigration experience – seek to protect themselves against the 'foreign bodies' of the liminal entities.

In Oliva's *The City of Yes*, various different liminal entities are treated as threatening or dangerous to society. Like diseased persons or criminals, they are separated from the general public to protect the well-being of others, or, as Turner describes, to prevent the "pollution" of a society. The narrator's friend, Endo, explains to him the labels for those who are different from the recognized Japanese norm:

> He then told me that an Occidental who functioned relatively well in Japan with the language, the sports, and the chopsticks, is called *nihonjin mitai*: "Japanese-looking." And the Japanese person who spends time in America, picking up foreign habits (or Levi's jeans and spoken English), is sometimes called *gaijin kusai*: "foreign-smelling." The difference between these two labels seemed more poignant when I learned that the actual meaning of *gaijin* isn't *foreigner*; the word literally means *outside person*. It seemed I was either Japanese or I was outside humanity. (56)

The narrator finds out immediately upon arrival that, as a foreigner, the label that separates him from proper Japanese society also presents him as less than human. Also, even the immigrant who blends in linguistically and culturally is "Japanese-looking," implying a similarity in appearance but lacking authenticity. Likewise, those who have been polluted by Western culture 'smell' – likely unpleasantly – of the outside world.

The narrator finds this distinction even more alienating when he learns that he must carry a card that identifies him as a foreigner:

> I became an outside person – an apparition made real – just a few days later. Endo relayed a message from Shacho that I was to be fingerprinted. All foreigners, he said, even Japanese-born Koreans, were required by law to report to their local city hall and register as "Aliens" within ninety days of arrival or birth…The Alien Registration card was

> laminated for its protection against the elements and was to be carried for my protection at all times. It was deep blue and white and listed my address in Japan, my sponsor, Shacho, and a requisite serial number. There was a place for my thumb-print (in miniature) next to my photo. The instant I saw the card I seemed to shrink to fit its dimensions and I became that small, blue Alien in a white frame. The label was as palpable as a mouthful of sand; I could suddenly taste it everywhere. (57)

The narrator feels, as do most immigrants, reduced to the label that is assigned to him by the local government and people. Also, the punitive nature of the card is inescapable, as he is fingerprinted like a criminal. Ironically, he is told that he must carry the card for his own protection, which is an excuse used throughout history as a means of control by those in positions of power. In Canada, for example, Trudeau invoked the War Measures Act in 1970, which gave the police sweeping powers over the general public, in order to combat a small number of FLQ terrorists. Likewise, England is currently implementing a controversial program of mandatory identification cards to be made for and carried by all citizens. These are supposed to protect innocent people from the threat of terrorism, despite protests that they are both extremely costly to the taxpayer and questionable in their dependability as identification. The actions of governments and their people to identify and separate the 'other', the 'unlike', are often fueled by fear and then justified by claims to protect society from dangerous pollutants.

In this novel, the Japanese leaders and common people of the seventeenth century also go to extreme measures to shield themselves from MacDonald, a liminal being. In addition to the previously-mentioned incident, in which locals hold up sheets to deny his existence, a Japanese captain and friend of MacDonald's pays with his life for bringing the women in his family to visit

MacDonald: "In the weeks that followed this visit MacDonald noticed the man's sudden absence from the day's schedule of guards. The captain, he was told, had his head chopped off – which was how he expressed it – for breaking the law" (245). This is an understandable – albeit extreme – reaction if liminal persons are viewed as diseases or dangerous pollutants, as greater measures are normally taken to shield women and children in hazardous and threatening situations. The Captain's intentional exposure was likely seen as reckless and unthinkable.

Although the twentieth century Japan of the narrator's time is obviously more welcoming to the outside world, the narrator still recognizes the undesirability of being different from the cultural norm. He demonstrates his understanding of this lesson early on, while discussing Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer (another liminal entity) with his students:

> She wanted to know, with grave urgency, "What were the names that all the other reindeer called Rudolph?"
> "Bad names," I said.
> "What bad names?"
> "Nicknames," I said, unnerved by her serious face. "He had a red nose," I said. "Nobody else did…"
> "Yes, yes," her friends agreed. They knew about the nose. They knew the other reindeer didn't like him. He was shunned. He was avoided. But what were the *names*?
> "Rudolph," I said, "you're a jerk."
> Their eyes lit up.
> "Rudolph, your nose is a lantern outside a Yakitori restaurant…You are communist. You are…
> They waited, thrilled with expectation. I was searching for the worst possible thing you might say to a reindeer in Japan…
> "You are *different*," I said. (73, 74)

Even Endo, the narrator's Japanese friend and guide, who was born, raised, and always lived in Japan, carries enough of a foreign 'smell' to make his fellow

citizens uneasy: "Endo was something of an expert on foreigners. Though he'd never travelled outside Japan, he was in such close proximity to *gaijin* teachers, year after company year, that other Japanese salarymen seemed to treat him as a quasi-foreigner, a *gaijin kusai*, or (at best) a bit of an oddity" (75). In being in close proximity to foreign teachers, Endo has picked up, like a disease, their foreign mannerisms and influence. Although both foreigners and Japanese go to him for help and advice in dealing with the other culture, he is ultimately held at bay because of his differences. Finally, perhaps the ultimate symbol of the danger of the foreigner in Japan, Oliva reminds us, is expressed by a photo of Rita Hayworth – an image of the Western world and values – taped to the first atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima (291).

If *The City of Yes* is read as a displaced metaphor of a liminal entity living in Canada, there are also ample Canadian examples of similar reactions of fear and rejection of the 'other'. Although the Japanese reaction to MacDonald seems extreme in our twenty-first century perspective, it has only been sixty-three years since the Canadian government forced a similar imprisonment. In 1942, in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor, the Canadian government evacuated approximately 23,000 Japanese-Canadians from their homes and moved them into POW camps ("Japanese"). These Japanese-Canadians, many of whom were born and raised in Canada, were forced to abandon homes, possessions, and businesses, for which they received little or no compensation. Furthermore, unlike the American POW camps, families were separated, as the men were sent to labour on sugar beet farms and the women and children were sent to other camps in the interior of

British Columbia. Although many of these first, second, and even third generation Canadians of Japanese descent were culturally and linguistically similar to their other fellow citizens, their physical differences marked them as foreign, and therefore dangerous. Like the *nihonjin mitai*, who are "Japanese-looking," but never quite Japanese, the Canadian government and general public were not able to see past the differences to include them in the same category of "Canadian citizen" in which they put themselves.

Oliva may inadvertently be commenting on his own history as well, as other ethnic groups, including Italians, were also targeted and interred during World War II. For Italians, the internment came two years earlier, in 1940, immediately after Italy declared war on Canada. A witch hunt ensued, in which approximately 700 Italian-Canadians, accused of being fascist sympathizers, were interred in camps in Ontario and Alberta. Also, the government required that all persons born in Italy and living in Canada be registered, regardless if they were suspected to have fascist ties or not. Stanislao Carbone describes, in his book *The Streets Were Not Paved With Gold: A Social History of Italians in Winnipeg*, how Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King called on the War Measures Act to justify these "protective" measures. In addition to those interred, who lost jobs and property, Italians in general suffered both socially and financially. They were often shunned and mistreated by a suspicious public and forbidden to teach or speak the Italian language. Also, they were financially penalized as well, as many boycotted Italian businesses and provincial governments ordered the termination of all relief payments to non-naturalized Italians.

The aforementioned examples, both literary and historical, emphasize Turner's and Douglas' hypothesis that liminal entities are often viewed as dangerous and polluting by those who have not been through the same process. In *The Ritual Process*, Turner explains that "...an in-group preserves its identity against members of out-groups, protects itself against threats to its way of life, and renews the will to maintain the norms on which the routine behavior necessary for its social life depends" (110, 111). In these cases, the process under suspicion is immigration, either recent or distant; the fear generated by ethnic 'otherness' provokes in the general public the desire to separate, isolate and reject the "dangerous" person(s), in order to protect and maintain the well-being of the group.

Another typical characteristic of the liminal phase, because liminal persons are stripped of their previous identity, is the re-naming or de-naming of initiates. In some cases, names are bestowed upon liminal entities which more appropriately describe the new phase they are experiencing. These are usually more general terms which apply to a whole group, reflecting the phase more than their individual identity. Turner explains in *The Forest of Symbols*:

> The same name is very frequently employed to designate those who are being initiated into very different states of life. For example, among the Ndembu of Zambia the name *mwadi* may mean various things: it may stand for "a boy novice in circumcision rites," or "a chief-designate undergoing his installation rites," or, yet again, "the first or ritual wife" who has important ritual duties in the domestic family. Our own terms "initiate" and "neophyte" have a similar breadth of reference. (95, 96)

The "de-naming" or "re-naming" also goes hand in hand with other previously-discussed characteristics of the liminal phase, such as the stripping of status (which is often tied in with a name). For example, the chief-elect and his wife are called the same general term, meaning "initiate," during the liminal process to release their ties with their previous identity and emphasize their lack of status. Also, the act of "re-naming" is consistent with symbols of birth, as a baby is named at birth. Once again, there are ties between Turner's and VanGennep's description of this aspect of liminality and the experiences of immigrants in coming to a new country.

In *The Lion's Mouth*, Bianca and her family are de-named and re-named in various ways, which mainly emphasizes their lack of status. Although the Mazzin family is not literally de-named, they are done so figuratively. In Venice, their family had enjoyed a level of social recognition and was considered part of a respectable class. In Canada, they – particularly her mother – feel this loss keenly when they fall under the homogenizing term of 'immigrant'. While visiting Italy, Bianca is no longer called by the name "Venetian," which would reflect the previous phase of her life, but "Canadian," which refers to her new phase. Bianca also experiences a different kind of de-naming and re-naming when she confronts racial slurs on the playground; when she sidles close to her peers, they chant "We don't want no DP's," meaning "Displaced Persons" (112). Likewise, in *Drowning in Darkness*, the entire Italian-Canadian community, made up of a vast variety of individuals, is reduced to the name of 'Dagotown' and promptly dismissed. Racial slurs have the ability to both de-name and re-name. The real

names of the victims of these labels are erased, along with any recognition of individual identity, and replaced by a derogatory, homogenizing term.

In the novella *Becoming Emma*, Aida re-names herself several times in an attempt to shed her ethnicity and become more 'American', which is also consistent with images of birth and death. She feels encouraged to do so by American and English images of desirability, and later by a professor she idolizes. Aida first attempts to become/give birth to 'Sandra' at age 13, when her family moves from multi-ethnic Brooklyn to an upscale neighbourhood in upstate New York. Aida is prompted to choose the name 'Sandra' after watching a movie starring Sandra Dee, in which she charms her newlywed husband under her control. Aida reasons:

> In her observation of the boys at her school or her father's friends or even the shopkeepers around the neighbourhood, she saw them respond to Sandra-like qualities in women, to sweetness, cuteness, softness. Sandra, the name summoned up the aura, all fluffy and pink, that drew men's attention. Aida had the same hair colour as the actress and the same pink and white skin, but the rest of her was disappointingly different. Already, Aida was tall, broad-shouldered, with sharp cheekbones, deep-set eyes and a long, narrow nose. What else could she expect with a name Aida Avendemis? What else would anyone expect? If at least she had a turned-up nose, she was sure her whole face would look better: softer, rounder. It was no use bringing up the idea of plastic surgery with her parents…For now she was stuck with her nose and her face. But her name – she had more control there. (85)

As an adolescent, Aida resents the difference conjured up by her name and the disparity between the American physical ideal and her own Latvian features. However, to her surprise, and although others accept her as 'Sandra', she does not change, physically and mentally, to fit her new name. She explains to her friend,

Velga, who is another Baltic immigrant, that she regrets her choice: "It was not long afterwards that Aida, to her embarrassment, began to suspect that as a name Sandra was a poor choice. She tried to explain to Velga … 'The weird part is that at first it felt right. Well, not right but sort of neat. And then, it didn't. It isn't me. I thought I could become a Sandra, but now I don't think I can'" (87). Instead of returning to 'Aida', however, she tries to become another name, this time inspired by Jane Austen.

Aida discovers Jane Austen at a time when she is confused and repelled by the behaviour of her parents and their Latvian friends and the world they make known to her. Jane Austen offers her order in a time of confusion:

> Aida read the novels, all six of them, the way she watched the Sandra Dee movie. They were full of hints of how life should be lived; be good, they said, and you will be rewarded with "perfect happiness." Grow in understanding and principles. Avoid idleness, ignorance, and meanness… In Austen's world, moral choices were important; they had consequences…Outside Aida's door on those party nights… was a wilderness where Aida knew little and felt much. Outside was confusion and loss, outside was a murky connection between black and white magazine photos of stacked corpses and sepia-toned family portraits, a grey link between the good old days and terror…Aida heard – there are no reasons, no choices, no consequences. The innocent and the wicked were both slaughtered. (94)

However, instead of working to accept, learn of, and embrace her ethnicity, Aida promptly tries to escape it through the clear-cut, morally-defined world of Jane Austen. Again, she de-names herself, losing/killing 'Aida' and 'Sandra', and re-names herself 'Emma', hoping with her new name to inherit the 'American Dream': "This was America, the promised land, a cultivated garden in a white picket fence of good fortune. And she was an heiress to her parents' hopes and

expectations. In the upstate town, Aida chose to be Emma and looked about her for a Mr. Knightly to instruct and guide her" (94). This time, the narrator explains, she does become the name in a sense, although not the Emma of Jane Austen but the "more universal and pathetic" Emma Bovary.

Aida's abandonment of her ethnic self does not happen immediately, as she believes and wishes, but takes a slow and steady process. Her attempt to rid herself of 'Aida' may be compared to her attempt to rid herself of the broken capillaries on her legs, both equally as unwanted:

> She found three broken capillaries on her legs...She rushed to the dermatologist who inserted a tiny needle in the heart of each red cluster and flushed away the flaws, flushed away with salt and alcohol, warmth creeping up her leg. Gone, his needle a magic wand, except in a few minutes they were back, ugly and raw, and the actual erasure occurred slowly over several weeks. (187)

Likewise, as a child she believes that 'Aida' will be immediately erased, while remnants of her ethnicity still appear as an adult. In her late thirties, and now living in Canada, contradictions and inconsistencies between her two selves occur, as she is 'Aida' to some people and 'Emma' to others. Although, she seems to be trying to heed the advice of her former professor and mentor, who discouraged any reflection of ethnicity in her work: "You must look to where you are going, not from where you come" (88). Indeed, as she is about to embark on an affair with her 'Mr. Knightly', in a last-ditch attempt to escape her life, she finally becomes the pathetic Emma Bovary: "Emma Avendemis at twenty-two: the face was still more Aida than Emma...Emma Zeps at thirty-eight: now she was truly Emma" (176).

Emma experiences a third de-naming after her disastrous affair ends and her mother suffers a stroke, which happen almost simultaneously. The first thing she says to her mother as she enters the hospital room is, "'It's me – Aida'" (209). At this point, when 'Emma' crumbles, she realizes the deception and destruction in her attempt to 'become Emma'. While her mother is in the hospital, she meets up with her old friend, Velga, who has also gone through various name changes in her life. Velga, who is a wrinkled, bleached-blonde version of her former self, and now 'Diane', has gone through a string of jobs, husbands, and lovers, and now sings in a band and prostitutes herself on the side. In the process of becoming Aida again, she sees the futility and dissatisfaction in her and Velga's attempt to erase their ethnicity – a vital part of their identity. The 'American Dream', she sees, is an illusion and a lie sold by the media:

> She was drinking Scotch and flipping through magazines when she found one with Sandra Dee on the cover. Her face was no longer a pretty confection. The woman looked strained, almost puffy. Inside, the former star told her story, a common story of child abuse, alcoholism, and anorexia. Emma felt herself turning back into Aida, back into that adolescent girl who had looked at Sandra Dee on the screen and yearned to have her cute face, her compact body, her privileged American life. If I could only have a waist that small, she used to think to herself. And now she discovered that Sandra Dee herself did not have a waist that small, except through starvation, except through a perversion of normal impulses. Emma's eyes prickled with tears. She felt cheated, lied to, betrayed. (216)

Having finally abandoned her illusions of embodying an American ideal, she recognizes her loss in not knowing her ethnic roots: "She felt the loss – for the first time she felt it in her arms and legs and heart and stomach, salt on the skin, on the tongue – the loss of the country she had never known, never seen, the loss

of the very idea of that country" (216). In becoming 'Aida' again, she avoids the destructive death, both literal and figurative, of Flaubert's Emma Bovary.

Oliva's *The City of Yes* offers a slightly different perspective regarding the process of de-naming and re-naming; through Endo, who is the quintessential playful, liminal character, Oliva suggests that a person becomes their name – and it is therefore of great importance – but that perhaps identity isn't fixed, but fluid. Indeed, the novel seems full of contradictions and grey areas regarding names and identity. Initially, Endo's attempt to give the narrator a Japanese name seems to be the typical response by native citizens when confronting the uncomfortably foreign: the immigrant's name is changed for the ease and convenience of those in the new country. The narrator states: "…Endo finally settled on a Japanese name for me. He said that without a vowel at the end of my name, I have become rather difficult to pronounce. Endo didn't differentiate a name from a person, so he simply said, 'You don't roll across the tongue so well'" (77). However, the novel also contains various other references that suggest the importance of a name, as Endo does above, in that the name and the man are one and that a man can become a name.

The narrator soon learns of the importance that one's name carries in Japan. He observes:

> I had already learned that, in modern Japan, a name becomes a man and vice versa. The mere presentation of a name began with intimate gestures of immense significance. A man's business card was offered with both hands, palms open slightly. The business card, his *meishi* , was meant to be read immediately, so script itself was presented to the receiver…I knew that a man's name and (by approximation) his business card was not unceremoniously stuffed inside a

> back pocket. To say the word *meishi* was to say these words literally in medieval Chinese: *name slice.* (183)

Endo suggests that the narrator's new Japanese name, meaning "Wing-Weaver," or "Crane," is appropriate for him, as it refers to an old Japanese story of a crane, which reflects his impatience. Immediately after receiving his Japanese name, the narrator does, to a degree, become the name by immersing himself further into Japanese culture. He starts to study the Japanese language, which gives him significant insight into every aspect of the people and country. Interestingly, the narrator's Canadian name is never revealed throughout the novel, which makes this process seem more natural and less stilted. Endo, himself, near the end of the novel, requests that the narrator re-name him "Enzo," a Western name:

> "You can call me Enzo," he said.
> "Enzo?"
> "I like that name quite a bit."
> I nodded, as if I understood what he was talking about.
> He wanted a Western pseudonym, I suppose – something Mediterranean – as much as I wanted a fresh start. (240, 241)

The narrator refers to him as "Enzo," directly and indirectly, from this point on. In this case, the man has already become the name, as Endo shows considerable Western influence in his language and behaviour throughout the novel. The narrator also hints at this transformation through earlier comments, such as: "He (Enzo) took off his heavy glasses and rubbed his eyes and I noticed that the glint from the hallway's bulb had coloured his eyes blue" (78). Obviously, Oliva demonstrates, there is a strong connection between one's name, who they are, and who they become.

What, then, seems a contradiction to the importance of a name is Endo's suggestion that it is something that you can take and leave: "Endo explained that a name is a kind of vehicle – a boat, perhaps – that could carry me along. I could get out at any time" (113). Perhaps what Oliva is suggesting, through the re-naming and de-naming of characters, is not the expected erasure of identity, but the possibility of cultural reciprocity. As we do not live in a vacuum, to shut out all influence of the other is unnatural, limiting, and fossilizing. Although the narrator will never 'be' Japanese, and does not aspire to be, he does participate in and appreciate the culture considerably more as he immerses himself in the language, the customs, and the people. His Japanese name does not, and cannot, erase his North American identity, but it is an indication of his willingness to explore. Likewise, Endo is a playful character who is enriched, not diminished, by his curiosity of other cultures. The idea of reciprocity is reinforced by his choice of Western name – Enzo – which is, more specifically, Italian. The narrator's own Italian background is hinted at in the novel, and the author's Italian background is well known. In this sense, they both have considerable influence in the re-naming of each other. Unlike Aida in her quest to deny her ethnic identity, Oliva's re-naming and de-naming suggests, instead, the possibility of positive mutual cultural exchange and influence.

Another characteristic of the liminal phase is that the initiate becomes a 'blank slate', or is ground down to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers. Turner explains, in *The Forest of Symbols*:

> The passivity of neophytes to their instructors, their malleability, which is increased by submission to ordeal,

> their reduction to a uniform condition, are signs of the process whereby they are ground down in order to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to cope with their new station in life…His apparent passivity is revealed as an absorption of powers which will become active after his social status has been redefined in the aggregation rites. (101, 102)

It is in this abased, liminal state that initiates are supposed to be the most open and receptive to the instruction of those in positions of authority. According to Turner, liminal entities "…have to be shown that in themselves they are clay or dust, mere matter, whose form is impressed upon them by society" (Ritual 103). The malleable, liminal phase is an important period in which one receives the skills necessary to be successful in the next stage of reaggregation. For example, Turner explains how the Ndembu tribe chases away men who have not gone through their secluded, circumcision rituals, but were instead circumcised in a hospital; they are missing this vital period of growth, and therefore not worthy or prepared to join the rest of the tribe. Ultimately, as quoted in the introduction, the expectation is that in order for individuals to go higher on the social ladder, they must first go lower than the ladder.

Both of Edwards' novels contain prime examples of characters that are ground down with the expectation of being fashioned anew. Firstly, in *The Lion's Mouth*, Bianca is subjected to her lover's attempt to grind down her own ethnic background and fashion her after his own. Jack, who is of Ukrainian descent, first goes through considerable effort to instruct her, in order to make her into more of what he considers to be an Albertan:

> It was Jack who taught me the names of the flowers – Indian paintbrush, Queen Anne's lace, fairy bells, who taught me to recognize the different species of mush-

> rooms, to categorize the different types of birch. He insisted I learn how to cross-country ski…I was convinced I couldn't do it. But Jack was not easily deterred and I found I could…In the summer and fall, long walks along the North Saskatchewan River, the graveyard at Pakan, the church at Frog Lake. And, always, the pauses, the halts for my instruction. Note well this bird, that flower. (61)

Then, as their relationship becomes more committed, Jack also attempts to overpower her own ethnicity in order to refashion her after his own, Ukrainian heritage:

> …[H]e and I were too exotic for each other, too much an exciting vacation, too little the solidity of home. Jack felt we could construct that stable base, but out of his bricks. The instruction would be stepped up. I refused to learn the Cyrillic alphabet. Undaunted, he pasted labels with the appropriate Ukrainian names, transliterated, on all the household objects…Embroidered runners on the furniture, folkloric candlesticks, reproduction ikons. 'The expression of the people,' he would say, 'for there were no Ukrainian bourgeois, you know,' and let himself go, drifting off on a historical lecture…He was so good at getting his way. His strength of will matched the strength of his big, muscular body. But I could not give myself up totally. I could not be joined to him by words in an alien tongue, tied by unknown gestures and ritual clothes. I let myself be changed, not remade. And as I pulled back and resisted, he happened upon someone more malleable…(67, 68)

Unlike Turner's liminal entities, Bianca does not want to be fashioned anew in the way that the self-appointed authority figure, Jack, expects her to be. She allows herself to be ground down to a point, or "changed," as she puts it, but ultimately rejects his imprint. Bianca breaks away from Turner's sequence, as she lacks the malleability of others in this stage, which then prevents her 'reaggregation', or marriage.

In *Becoming Emma*, Aida also refers to being ground down in order to be fashioned anew. However, unlike Bianca, she is a willing participant. This process may be compared to making a print on a lithograph stone, which was a skill Aida had learned at university:

> She began by carrying the stone to the basin. There she ground off the last image. She drew her design and covered it with gum arabic. Then, she took her bottle of acid and spread it over the surface. She had to be careful. She had to be exact. Too little and she would be left with nothing; too much and she would also be left with nothing. It was a question of balance – the right balance. She wet the stone. She rolled on the ink. She was sensitive to how the ink was pooling, to how the stone was absorbing. She was aware. She put on a wet piece of paper. She put on blankets and wax to get the stone through the press. She was careful. She was exact. Too little pressure and there would be no printing; too much and the stone would break. Awareness, balance, always balance. (102)

Aida takes the first step herself by attempting to grind away her ethnic name, and, therefore, her ethnic identity. She later refers directly to the process of being ground down, but not yet fashioned anew, as she describes her depression to her mother: "'Look, Mum, with me – Well, I'm like an old lithograph stone. The old picture has been ground away. And a new one hasn't yet been drawn'" (114, 115). Although Aida consistently desires the 'reaggregation' stage – which would mean acceptance and privileges in her new country – her 'instructors' prove to be incompetent. Aida, from her childhood, consistently looks towards images from the media to pattern herself after. She is, each time, left feeling dissatisfied and not any closer to the desired 'reaggregation'. She is suspended in a blank, ground-down stage. At the end of the novella, as she becomes 'Aida' again, she has finally stopped seeking the imprint of the other and achieved more of an

awareness and balance, though not as she had once expected and not as a result of those to whom she had previously looked.

Although the abasing liminal period does not usually bring immigrants the expected endowment of power and privileges in the way they originally expected – mainly monetarily – it does, nonetheless, bestow them with another, unexpected power. Turner recognizes that liminal persons contain certain 'powers of the weak'; their lack of status allows for subversion in the face of established norms. Turner describes the power that liminal entities hold as akin to the court jester, who was "...given license to gibe at the king and courtiers, or lord of the manor" (Ritual 109). Turner also calls the liminal phase, "...the venue and occasion for the most radical scepticism..." concerning society's norms and values (Anthropology 102). In this phase, liminal entities contain a certain subversive power, having the ability to view society from a unique perspective and being outside the realm of its constraints. The aspect of 'play' and 'playfulness' is also included in this interstitial state, its subjunctive nature being both evolutionary and revolutionary. Finally, Turner describes liminality as "... a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise" (Forest 97). In this ambiguous phase, where aspects of the previous stage and the future stage hold no bearing, the possibility for new perspectives and fresh creativity exists, unfettered by pre-established societal expectations and influences.

In *Becoming Emma*, Edwards hints at the potential Aida would have for subverting the North American patriarchal system if she were to acknowledge her Latvian roots. Interspersed throughout the novella are references to traditional

aspects and beliefs of Latvian culture where the female is empowered, making a sharp contrast to Aida's pathetic transformation into Emma Bovary. Edwards writes that "The inconsistent Moon is male. The all important Sun is female. Since the Sun dominates the heavens, her sign, the eight segmented circle is used more than all other signs in Latvian design" (163). Also, "In the Latvian card game *Zolite*, the Queen, not the King is the top card. Queens always beat out Kings" (169). References such as these pepper Aida's story of becoming Emma, hinting at the strong and subversive being that Aida could be if she were to recognize the power and importance of her ethnicity. Instead, we witness her abandon her name, bow under her art professor's criticism of her ethnic patterns, and wander a self-destructive path for a handsome and shallow man. The strength represented in the traditional Latvian view of the woman is juxtaposed to the banalities and promise of gratification sold by the 'American Dream'. However, as Aida does, in the end, start to recognize her loss, aspects of her ethnicity start to reappear in her daily life again, including in her art. Returning to her art, which includes aspects of Latvian design and myth, coincides with her recognizing her ethnicity, which is another characteristic of the liminal phase: "Liminality, marginality, and structural inferiority are conditions in which are frequently generated myths, symbols, rituals, philosophical systems, and works of art" (Turner, Ritual 128). In this process, Edwards hints, Aida may yet tap into that power.

Edwards' *The Lion's Mouth* also refers to a realm of possibility that has arisen as a result of Bianca's emigration. Throughout her childhood and teenaged

years, Bianca juxtaposes the safe order she feels in Italy with the insecurity and chaos she experiences in Canada. She uses the words, "enclosure," "cocooning," "comfort," and "insulating blanket of protectiveness" to describe her impressions of life in Venice. Canada, instead, is "stripped," and "exposed," and its children "as wild and dangerous as the animals…[that] roamed the nearby foothills and mountains" (109 – 111). Although the connotations of her word choice are only negative, there is a positive aspect to this move from the safe to the chaotic; Mary Douglas, in her book *Purity and Danger*, explains that disorder is unlimited and destroys existing patterns, but it also has potentiality (94). Bianca, as an adult, refers to this same feeling of possibility in reference to her impressions of Edmonton and Venice. She thinks of Venice as "…that mirage on the horizon, that stone reality, that maze of curving streets that draws me deeper and deeper." Edmonton, on the other hand, "…draws never in but out to immensity, to limitlessness, to the indifference of land not yet shaped by man's hand" (60). In Bianca's case, upon finishing her novel, she recognizes the possibility she holds in shaping her environment, rather than being defeated by it. In her previous attempts to write a novel, the female, Italian protagonist is always crushed and overcome by the hostile, Canadian environment. In her fourth attempt, which is the novel we read, she understands: "I will, with the others, make this city, imagine it fully. The possibility exists…I began to believe that the people around me and, yes, I, could also shape these vast spaces…" (268, 269). In leaving her safe, secure, and well-defined home and becoming a liminal entity, Bianca wields the power to shape another environment.

Bianca and her mother also subvert established systems as they mix the familiar Canadian language and literature with their own unique, ethnic perspective. Bianca subverts the norms of Canadian literature by introducing an Italian perspective, which creates an unfamiliar mix that makes other writers uncomfortable:

> After I wrote that third novel, I took it to that summer writing school in Saskatchewan…It was like being in elementary school again. 'Subtle, obscure, needlessly complex,' they all agreed, even the very subtle Canadian Writer. The worst transgression of all was my writing of Italy. 'Why?' they asked. 'Why not write of here? You can never do it well. Not like an Italian would. Give it up.' And what they didn't say, but was heard. 'Be like us.' They wrote of the land, of growing up on farms, of battling the elements, of the strain of moving to the city. (229, 230)

Through literature, Bianca challenges the fundaments of traditional Canadian literature, as she holds a unique perspective that is familiar with two languages and cultures. Although the other writers resist the 'contamination' of the 'life on the prairies' norm, she continues to write of both Canada and Venice, as we read in the fourth novel attempt, which is *The Lion's Mouth*.

Bianca's mother also subverts language by playing with English and ignoring conventional context and meaning. Turner describes 'play' itself as being liminal, as it often combines the familiar and the unfamiliar, like her mother does: "[Play's] flickering knowledge of all experience possible to the nervous system and its detachment from that system's localizations enables it the liminal function of ludic recombination of familiar elements in unfamiliar and often quite arbitrary patterns"(Anthropology 170). Likewise, although Mrs. Mazzin learns

English unusually quickly, she does not always adhere to its conventions and puts together the familiar with the unfamiliar:

> Unlike most Italian immigrant women, Mamma had learned English relatively quickly; the appropriate sounds, but she didn't learn the context, the web of social meaning. If the words sounded right, sounded as she sensed they should, her intended meaning must be there, no matter what I claimed. 'Crazy bones', she would call me affectionately, or she'd inform me, 'I've been working like a moose'. (121)

Despite her daughter's protests, Mrs. Mazzin is not interested in changing her way of speech to a more conventional mode; she continues in her version of English without apology. Both mother and daughter are revolutionary in their use of language, as they ignore convention and societal pressure and mold it according to their own desire.

Pep, in *Drowning in Darkness*, exhibits a similar playful approach to language as he tries to impress his potential bride in Italy. Although he is not a character one would normally associate with subversion, as he faithfully works in the mines and doesn't question this existence, his subversion is an unintentional manifestation of his bicultural background. In writing to Sera, he reclaims the English language by assigning new meaning to many Canadian flowers, while also integrating aspects of the Italian language:

> The whole family – aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces and nephews – listened to stories about Canadian snapdragons, shooting stars, buttercups, tiger lilies and roosterheads. *This one is called the head of the rooster because it is floppy and red and crows when picked from the ground.* Even daisies excited her because Pep told her they were named after the sun – the day's eye – and the English language became something magical…Pep may have researched the words or made them up; Sera didn't know

> where he learned the words. His letters told her that sunflowers weren't 'turn to the sun' or *girasole*, as they were in Italian. In English, *girasole* became Jerusalem, a name that other travellers had carried with them to pollinate even the cities between Italy and Canada – between her and him. Carnations, he said, were made from the ragged edges of raw meat: *carne*. (28)

Because of Pep's bilingual and bicultural background, he is able to endow these English words with new meaning. He has a unique and thorough knowledge of both languages and cultures, which allows him to explore between the two. As previously quoted, in this betwixt and between state "… novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise." Pep subverts the English language by introducing Italian meanings to English words and replacing their conventional explanations with unique, sometimes ethnic, ones.

In Oliva's *The City of Yes*, Endo is the true court jester – the quintessential playful, liminal being – "who is given license to gibe at the king." In *The Anthropology of Performance*, Turner refers to 'play' as a liminal character because it shuttles back and forth between the different hemispheres of the brain, between the subjunctive and the indicative, the real and the hypothetical. Endo does this repeatedly is his story telling by integrating famous Western characters into historical events in Japan, then leaving the narrator to wonder if he truly believes his own story. Turner also calls play an "adventurer." Endo is, at times, subtly compared to the early, liminal adventurer and explorer, Ranald MacDonald. For example, the narrator describes Endo's bed like a raft in a sea of books (93). Also, according to Turner, play "…has a dangerous harmlessness, for it has no fear…It has the powers of the weak, an infantine audacity in the face of

the strong" (169). Indeed, Endo is portrayed as both infantile and revolutionary. For example, "He was a bachelor, despite his forty-nine years, and his mother – who lived several blocks away – still made most of his meals for him…" (80). In Endo's apartment, the narrator glimpses a Gentle Bunny waste-paper basket, a Hello Kitty pencil case, and *Pinocchio, Peter Pan,* and *The Neverending Story* on his bookcase. Despite his childlike qualities, he uses and teaches language and gestures to revolutionize the more reserved Japanese mode of speaking:

> On Tuesday afternoons he taught a class on Western gestures and sent an entire kindergarten class into the street with the knowledge that they, too, could say "Number one" and throw up their arms exactly like a team of soccer players in Leeds. He prepared them for every Western contingency. An interesting question? "Hmmm," he said, then forty children scratched their foreheads. A bad cappuccino? "Mama mia!" the yelled, and shook their small hands at the sky. He created monsters. Revolutionaries. (76)

Although Endo's play between two cultures may seem innocuous to the reader, it marks him as a "quasi-foreigner" and an "oddity," as previously quoted, and a threat to the Japanese culture. These examples are in line with Turner's hypothesis that

> Play could be termed dangerous because it may subvert the left-right hemispheric regular switching involved in maintaining social order. Most definitions of play involve notions of disengagement, or free-wheeling, of being out of mesh with the serious, "bread-and-butter," let alone "life-and-death" processes of production, social control, "getting and spending," and raising the next generation. (168)

While Endo – the court jester – is entertaining, his playfulness and refusal to take certain cultural aspects seriously are also seen as subversive and threatening to social order. The price he pays for his liminality is the suspicion of his fellow

countrymen; however, his life is portrayed as rich and quasi-mythical as a result of his freedom from rigid societal norms.

I have, up to this point, explored the parallels between the 'separation' and 'liminal' phases in a rite of passage, as described by Arnold VanGennep and Victor Turner, and the emigration/immigration process. The characters and themes in *The City of Yes, Drowning in Darkness, The Lion's Mouth* and *Becoming Emma* provide ample examples of the many similarities between the two. From the 'stripping of status' experienced by the Mazzin family in *The Lion's Mouth*, to the 'powers of the weak' demonstrated by Endo in *The City of Yes*, the commonalities shared by ritual neophytes and immigrants are considerable. The challenges and growth experienced in these first two stages are supposed to be preparatory: "The ordeals and humiliations…to which neophytes are submitted represent partly a destruction of the previous status and partly a tempering of their essence in order to prepare them to cope with their new responsibilities…" (Turner, Ritual 103). According to Turner and VanGennep, liminal entities should now be ready for the third and final stage: reaggregation. However, while this is a smooth and unquestioned transition in many of Turner's African tribe rituals – and the hope of many immigrants – it is rarely the reality. Instead of the expected step into status elevation and the bestowal of new rights and responsibilities, the outcomes of immigration are varied and unpredictable.

Chapter Two

Seafaring and Shipwreck

Continuing in Turner's and VanGennep's three-step sequence, which bears a strong likeness to the journey of the immigrant, 'reaggregation' is the subsequent and final stage. In *The Forest of Symbols,* Turner explains that reaggregation is where "…the passage is consummated. The ritual subject, individual or corporate, is in a stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations of a clearly defined and 'structural' type, and is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards" (94). In this stage, for example, the chief-elect now returns to his tribe to become the chief: "The phase of reaggregation in this case comprises the public installation of

the Kanongesha (chief) with all pomp and ceremony" (Ritual 102). The liminal period is supposed to have prepared the initiate for the bestowal of additional rights and responsibilities, greater stability, and a higher rung on society's ladder.

According to Turner, in the most common rituals of status elevation "...the ritual subject or novice is being conveyed irreversibly from a lower to a higher position in an institutionalized system of such positions" (167). Likewise, this is also the general expectation of those who leave their countries of origin and immigrate to a new land. Unfortunately, this is not always the reality. For example, in the introduction we read how Sera, the protagonist in *Drowning in Darkness*, is seduced into leaving Italy by the fantasy of 'America' and its promise of fortune. She then arrives in Alberta's Crowsnest Pass to marry a man "...far from the man she imagined..." and tries to give shape to an isolated existence in a dusty, segregated town (41). The ideal, third phase of reaggregation will never be achieved in her personal situation and community, where silence and generational displacement is the norm. Indeed, this – and variety of other experiences – ends up being the reality of the immigration process. Although 'reaggregation', with its promise of status elevation and stability, is the expectation for both Turner and many immigrants, the subsequent outcome is far less predictable or ideal in the case of immigration.

There are a many images of seafaring and shipwreck that aptly describe the multiplicity of outcomes brought about by the immigration process. Like a voyage by ship, the immigration experience is hoped and expected to consist mainly of a departure, a transitory period, and, finally, an arrival in a safe harbour.

The ship, which offers an extension of dry land, seems to provide a temporary stability. Some ships arrive safely in their harbour, as intended, or perhaps in another safe harbour that they did not intend. Some stray, wander, or remain unmoving while their destination remains indefinitely elusive. Finally, others succumb to the dynamic and tumultuous shipwreck, in which the momentary stability offered by the ship is destroyed and some kind of resolution is brought to pass. Ultimately, there is no easy step from liminality into 'reaggregation'. In fact, there is no 'reaggregation' phase as described by Turner and VanGennep. However, there are other outcomes – some positive, some not – that come as a result of the voyage of immigration.

An underlying belief, in regards to both seafaring and immigration, is that it should not be attempted. Hans Blumenberg, in his essay 'Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm of a Metaphor for Existence', explains:

> Two prior assumptions above all determine the burden of meaning carried by the metaphorics of seafaring and shipwreck: first, the sea as a naturally given boundary of the realm of human activities and, second, its demonization as the sphere of the unreckonable and lawless, in which it is difficult to find one's bearings. (8)

Therefore, to attempt to venture beyond this "naturally given boundary" is considered transgressive and merits punishment. Blumenberg goes on to discuss

> ...the ancient suspicion that underlies the metaphorics of shipwreck: that there is a frivolous, if not blasphemous, moment inherent in all human seafaring, on a par with an offense against the invulnerability of the earth, the law of *terra inviolate*, which seems to forbid cutting through isthmuses or building artificial harbors – in other words, radical alterations of the relationship between land and sea. (10, 11)

Likewise, violating this "naturally given boundary" by leaving one's homeland and trying to establish an "artificial" harbour may, in the eyes of some, offend both God and nature. Given this ominous perspective, a successful voyage is an impossibility.

Several characters in Edwards' *The Lion's Mouth* seem to espouse a similar belief. Firstly, Marco, for whom Bianca writes this novel, is asked why he never attempted to leave Venice. His response is, "Can't imagine it. Safe harbour and all that" (56). For this character, who craves peace and stability after a turbulent childhood, crossing the physical and cultural boundaries to construct an artificial harbour elsewhere is not even given a consideration. However, his brother, Tarquinio attempts this voyage three times and – in line with the aforementioned assumptions – three times meets with disaster:

> While still a teenager, Tarquinio had gone to Canada. After two years he had come back with tales of the intolerable cold and of the ugliness of both country and people. Later, he had tried London, and it was there that he had met Lea, who had been visiting her estranged father. On each of their holidays for eight years, Tarquinio would be brimming with fresh examples of rudeness and prejudice... He wouldn't have left a third time, but the shipyard he worked in lost too many contracts. After months without work, he had left alone for Switzerland. Six months of isolation, six months of truly being seen as nothing. (55)

In viewing seafaring – or immigration – as a transgression and against the laws of nature, the inevitable outcome is failure and disaster. If one were to consider only Tarquinio's experiences, it would seem that this perspective is correct; a successful voyage is an impossibility.

In *The Lion's Mouth*, there are several other references to Bianca and Marco and an unattainable harbour. According to Blumenberg, Voltaire questions the existence of any safe harbour: "Sailors in port like to talk about their storms, but is there any port in this world? People shipwreck everywhere, even in a small brook" (37). The emigration of Marco's family, years earlier, from Yugoslavia to Venice supports Voltaire's suggestion. They had escaped bombings and violence in Zara and sought refuge in Venice. Marco explains this move to a friend:

> 'They bombed Zara forty-three times. Forty-three times. What could be worth bombing forty-three times?'
> 'It was the centre of Yugoslav fascist activity. They had to. They never bombed Venice.'
> 'No. Everyone knew they wouldn't. She's untouchable. That's why we came back here. Safe harbour'. (93)

However, Marco does not find the expected peaceful harbour in Venice. He also receives an operation on his stomach after arriving in Italy, and he carries the trauma of all of these incidents with him into adulthood: "He was a mass of tight, twitching nerves wrapped around a central emptiness. They had cut out his stomach, cut out, they said, the pain that had lived in him since infancy. But memories could never be cut out" (211). In Marco's case, emigration does not help him arrive in a peaceful port, as for him – like Voltaire suggests – one does not exist. Peace exists in a state of mind – not a physical location – that he is unable to reach.

The 'safe harbour' also remains elusive to Bianca as a teenager. She drifts in an interstitial state for a time, waiting for the wind to blow her into one harbour or another. Fontenelle's Herostratus, in *Dialogues of the Dead*, states that, "It is said that sailors fear most of all calm seas and that they want wind, even at the

risk of tempests" (qtd. in Blumenberg 30). Likewise, Bianca resents remaining unmoving, suspended in a betwixt and between state. For example, on her visits back and forth between Canada and Italy, her cousin introduces her as his "Canadian" cousin, while she still considers herself Venetian. Also, although she doesn't feel a part of Canadian culture, she is unable to shake the influence of the English language and express herself fully in Italian. As a teenager, Bianca finally wants to end her ambiguous drifting and reach a harbour in Canada: "I finally wanted to come to terms with the country I had been living in. I wanted to make her my country." However, even with her desire – the desire for wind to help her reach a port – the harbour remains unattainable: "But she was hidden, obscured. The history, the literature I was taught was English or American. The TV, the movies, the model for life was strictly American" (221). Her journey is not to be consummated at this point in her life, and she remains stranded, unmoving, at sea.

Bianca's family leaves Italy with an expectation that mirrors VanGennep's three stages or the ideal sea voyage: departure, journey, and successful arrival at the intended port. They fully expect to reach a safe harbour, which, for them, specifically represents financial success. Bianca explains that her parents came to Canada, like many immigrants, "...with the fantasy of quick profit, fast success" (110). Blumenberg also describes this as an age-old motivation for seafaring:

> The sea has always been suspect for cultural criticism. What could have motivated the move from land to sea but a refusal of nature's meager offerings, the monotony of agricultural labor, plus the addictive vision of quickly won rewards...the vision, that is, of opulence and luxury? ...It is precisely in this criticism that we first encounter

> the culture-critical connection between two elements characterized by liquidity: water and money (9).

Like so many before, the Mazzin family falls prey to the fantasy that emigration equals financial success. Although this is the harbour they are aiming for, it is not the one in which Bianca arrives. However, after both tumult and aimless drifting, she does arrive in a safe harbour of sorts that is partially of her own making.

Although Bianca seems to be heading for shipwreck several times in her life, in the face of isolation, rejection and identity confusion, there are several factors which help to nudge her toward an eventual safe harbour. Firstly, as a child, she uses the power of her imagination to shape her surroundings and create an environment in which she is included. As previously quoted, Bianca says "...I populated the gap between myself and everyone else with dwarves, giants, fairies, and elves...My involved stories filled the silence of the long hours I passed alone" (114). Her imagination allows her to surpass the boundaries established by her scornful peers and Canadian society. She survives in this manner until she is better able to grasp the language and attempt to participate in different ways.

Later, it is through her relationships with others that she is able to glimpse how the schism in her identity may be fused. Firstly, as a youth, it is her Canadian friend's interest in her Venetian life that allows her to discuss it and see that it is of value and interest in Canada as well:

> '...Your mother is so funny,' Jody would insist, 'not dull like mine.' Ironically, just as I wanted Jody's ordered, pastel life, she was envious of my summers in Venice. 'Tell me again about the canals and the beach. Come on. Tell me.' She was interested in the meals, the clothes, the TV programs, aunts, cousins, and, most of all, you. 'He does sound yummy.' With Jody, for the first time, I

> sensed how the two halves of my life could meet,
> the mask and the self fuse. (122)

Bianca has a similar experience again as an adult with her partner, Jack, and his friends. Although Jack often takes an overbearing role in her life, he does, to a degree, allow her to become more aware of her environment and help her to put aside some of her bias against it. Despite resisting Jack's 'instruction', Bianca comments:

> Yet in teaching me to recognize, teaching me to name, he changed me. It was as if the emotional slide through which I had been viewing the land, the slide that coloured the country oppressive, and infinitely barren, flipped up and back to be stored; a new one that painted the land familiar and supporting clicked into place. Old masks replaced by new? The vision of the outsider, Italian, American, or Eastern Canadian, superseded by that of the native? Partly. I did take on an attitude that was not only Jack's, but, with variations, that of his friends; an attitude of almost self-conscious concern, though still, at the base, an attitude of true interest...But I felt, I still feel, that I was doing more than simply absorbing their views, their masks. I was looking through. I was finally seeing what was here because I had finally lost my expectations of what should be here. (63)

Though the influence of other people alone does not and cannot lead Bianca to a safe harbour, it does give her glimpses of how she can be a part of, and at peace with, her environment. In this way, she is able to conceive of the possibility of a personal identity that includes both her Italian and Canadian selves.

Although language is what once alienated Bianca – in both her Canadian and Italian environment – it is the writing process that eventually allows her to be at peace with the duality of her identity, or 'reach a safe harbour'. This journey may be partially documented by her various attempts to write novels throughout

her youth and adulthood, in which she is the unnamed protagonist who is inevitably destroyed, or 'shipwrecked'. For example, in her first attempt to write a novel, Bianca says "...My main concern was in telling the story of 'a sensitive Italian girl' who immigrated, with her parents, to the prairies, who immigrated to loneliness and isolation, more, to an eventual mental and physical decay. For she was destroyed by the hostile, cold land" (107). Likewise, she describes a similar scene of inevitable doom in a later attempt: "My heroine, a Canadian girl with a Venetian background, was less innocent, less the victim than my last incarnation, though she was still irritatingly passive, irritatingly 'taken over' at the drop of a hat. I still wanted her destroyed and wanted the destruction to spring from a genetic deficiency, a Venetian inadequacy in the face of the harshness of the new land" (217).

In these periods, Bianca obviously does not see the outcome of emigration as anything other than total destruction. However, from her experiences, and from her previous attempts to write them, she is able to gather the material to build a new ship that will eventually carry her to a 'safe port'.

Blumenberg hints at a similar idea in reference to those who attempt to recreate a new reality out of already-established institutions. He questions where the materials will come from for this recreation: "Where can it come from, in order to give courage to the ones who are beginning anew? Perhaps from earlier shipwrecks?" (79). Bianca channels the materials of her previous shipwrecks, both written of and experienced, into her fourth novel, which is the novel that we read. It is through the process of writing, combined with her life experience, that

Bianca is able to "…exorcise [her] dream of Venice." She explains, "I needed to rid myself of the ache of longing that I have carried for so long" (269). By writing this novel, which is rich in complexity and contradiction, Bianca is able to shed her idealized view of her land of origin but still carry its influence with her into her current environment. Upon completion of the novel, Bianca recognizes "…for me, the time has come to end this hiding away. The connections have been made and the context developed" (267). Now, instead of being destroyed – or shipwrecked – by the elements that surround her, she recognizes that she, too, has the power to influence them:

> So I begin again my life in this city, this land. City: the place where the citizen is at home. I will, with the others, make this city, imagine it fully. The possibility exists. We are not yet confined by old fantasies and old blood, all the weight of what has been done, good and bad…I thought of your watery city that evening, 'founded', Machiavelli said, by 'a people who left an agreeable and fertile country to occupy one sterile and unwholesome,' a people who, through their industriousness and will created joy from a barren marsh. And I began to believe that the people around me and, yes, I, could also shape these vast spaces, could also learn the habit of art. What we could make with our gain. (269)

Though this is not the harbour that Bianca's parents intended – one of "quick profit" and "fast success" – it is a safe harbour nonetheless, and one that allows her to make peace with her dual identity.

The Avendemis family, in *Becoming Emma*, initially seems to have plodded through VanGennep's first two stages and subsequently arrived at the golden 'reaggregation' stage: Aida's parents flee their native Latvia and arrive in Germany as refugees, where Aida is born. From there, they move to America

with the hope of a better life for themselves and their daughter. They pass through the typical 'liminal' phase, while Mr. Avendemis works in factories and does cleaning jobs, and they live in lower-class Brooklyn. However, it appears that they do achieve the desired 'reaggregation' when Mr. Avendemis finally receives a well-paying job that is worthy of his education, and they move to an upper-class home and neighbourhood. This also coincides with their recent naturalization into the United States:

> Her father had a new job, his first job in America as an engineer. They had a new house, so new that parts of it were still unfinished and her father spent many late nights and weekends painting, applying baseboards or tiles. She was about to enter a new school in this new town, a picture perfect place of curving streets lined with Victorian mansions and trees. She felt as if she were beginning a new life, a life closer to that of families on television: an American life in a way that her life in Brooklyn was not. (81)

However, despite appearances, Turner's and VanGennep's tidy sequence once again does not apply; we know that Aida then follows a destructive path that leads her to deny her own identity and resemble the pitiful Emma Bovary. Blumenberg quotes Montaigne in his essay, warning that a life free from suffering may not always end so: "But beware the crash. There are thousands who are wrecked in the port"(15). Likewise, Aida's shipwreck does not occur until after her safe arrival, when it seems that all is well. In fact, the tempests that bring about her shipwreck begin precisely when she should be entering the peaceful 'reaggregation' period.

It is when Aida's family moves from Brooklyn to upstate New York that she first formally attempts to erase her ethnicity by changing her name to

'Sandra'. However, she eventually tires of 'Sandra' and opts for 'Emma' instead, influenced by the romantic Jane Austen. Meanwhile, as she tries on identities like clothing, her parents still try to give her the best of both worlds: "Her parents were ambitious for their only daughter. She was to have all the old, European accomplishments, as well as the best of American educations, the very, very best" (110). However, it is the influence of the American mainstream that overpowers her Latvian roots. In fact, once Aida reaches university, she feels that

> ...being Latvian seemed beside the point, inessential, a costume reserved for holidays. Here another set of differences counted. She learned to dissemble, to camouflage ...She stopped referring to the facts of her life, to Brooklyn or immigration or parents...She was young enough and American enough to think that with the proper education and dedication she could be whatever she wanted to be. (112)

This process of 'becoming Emma' continues into her adulthood and brings her closer to the brink of shipwreck. At her mother's distress that she is not teaching her children Latvian, Aida responds, "We live in North America. The boys will never have a reason to speak Latvian. If they ever do go over for a visit, which I very much doubt, it will be like visiting any other foreign place" (115). Aida arrives at a point of collapse – 'shipwreck' – when she fully becomes 'Emma': "Emma Avendemis at twenty-two: the face was still more Aida than Emma, the skin young, translucent, glowing ...Emma Zeps at thirty-eight: now she was truly Emma" (176). At this point, her days are comprised of banalities; she medicates herself by shopping compulsively, and she craves the instant gratification and excitement espoused in pop music. She turns to an affair to fill her void, and this also ends in disaster. Ironically, her mothers explains that they had wanted "...the

limitless American horizon, not [the] tribal boundaries..." of Brooklyn for Aida, not realizing that the 'American horizon' would result in the complete eradication of her ethnicity and subsequent shipwreck.

Not wanting to deal with her ethnicity makes Aida disassociate herself from, and become a spectator to, others who are struggling with issues relating to ethnicity. In this manner she perceives herself as standing on *terra firma* and projects the shipwreck onto the 'other'. Although Blumenberg discusses a whole spectrum of emotions that a spectator to a shipwreck may feel, it is Goethe's description that is most fitting in Aida's case: "[The spectator] can in fact also 'retreat into that selfish complacency that stands on the calmer shore and, from a secure position, smugly look on at the distant spectacle of confusion and wreckage'" (54). This may be seen in Aida's attitude towards her parents' expatriate Latvian social circle, whose problems and behaviours she regards in judgment and distaste:

> Aida was not sure if the process had been gradual or sudden, but she knew that, just as she had grown more and more frustrated with her name, she'd grown bored with the parties, that she was repelled by the words and gestures she'd been hearing and seeing all her life. The allure of the late evenings, those peepholes onto the complex of adult life, was gone. When cousin Andris, trying to prove his strength, lifted her father and staggered into the stove, she didn't find it funny. When she came upon Velga's father shaking his wife (between the toilet and the tub in the bathroom), she responded no longer with alert interest but with disgust. It was sordid, too sordid, and she did not want it to touch her. The tone of the parties had grown more frenetic. The years were passing; exile no longer seemed temporary. Alcohol and regrets swelled, then inflamed formerly innocuous actions and emotions into deformities. (92)

Aida assigning herself the role of the spectator, rather than a part of the shipwreck, coincides with her wanting to change her name to 'Sandra', which would cement this disassociation. Ironically, Blumenberg states that "It is reason that can make man into the spectator of what he himself suffers"(59). Aida's failure to acknowledge her part in the shipwreck does not save her but, in assuming the smug spectator role, only delays her own inevitable shipwreck.

Throughout the novella we see a repetition of Aida's admired professor's advice: "Look to where you are going, her professor said, not from where you come" (172). When both navigating a ship and chasing the 'American Dream', this seems to be sound advice; looking backward at the port of departure will not allow one to arrive at one's desired destination. Blumenberg suggests, however, through a poem by Lucretius, that looking ahead and carefully navigating the perils of a journey only puts off a greater disaster: What the navigator

> ...sees also lies before him in the future, as that which inevitably proceeds from life, which is "a sea full of rocky cliffs and whirlpools." He avoids these with care and caution, although he knows that the success of "all the effort and skill expended in making his way through" only brings him nearer the point at which his crack-up becomes inevitable. He knows that in this very way he "comes with every step forward closer to, indeed he even steers toward, the greatest, the total, inevitable, and incurable shipwreck: death." The latter is not only the ultimate goal of one's efforts but "worse than all the rocky cliffs that one evaded." (63)

Although Aida does not experience a physical death at the end of her journey, she does experience the death of her ethnic identity and a subsequent deficiency in every area of her life. Acknowledging, accepting, and embracing her Latvian roots throughout her life, which may have resulted in encounters with a "rocky

cliff" or "whirlpool," would have had a far less dramatic and devastating result than the complete shipwreck she suffers at age 38. As made evident through Lucretius' metaphor and Aida's experiences, her professor's advice to only look ahead, "to where you are going," only delays a later, larger disaster.

Aida does, from the debris of shipwreck, start to rebuild her life again. Her mother's stroke, combined with the hurt of a failed affair, allows her to abandon the charade of 'Emma' and begin to discover her ethnicity for the first time. Blumenberg states that "What can be salvaged from the shipwreck of existence proves to be not a possession withdrawn, in whatever way, into interiority but rather the self-possession achievable through the process of self-discovery and self-appropriation" (14). This is precisely what Aida gains; while visiting her mother in the hospital, she talks of memories of Brooklyn, gives news of what is happening in Latvia, and explains that her husband, Juris, is speaking Latvian with their children at home again. For the first time, she feels "...the loss of the country she had never known, never seen, the loss of the very idea of that country" (216). As Aida finally recognizes her ethnicity, it signals the turnaround for other areas of her life as well. She returns to her art again and is given the opportunity to do an art catalogue for a European tour. Ironically, shipwreck is what saves Aida. The narrator declares that Aida's/Emma's story is not destined to end in tragedy like Flaubert's: "There is no sad ending to this story. Flaubert, *ce n'est pas moi*" (219). Likewise, the story of the immigrant does not necessarily have to be one of tragedy, self-denial and defeat.

In Oliva's *The City of Yes*, both the narrator and the explorer, Ranald MacDonald, embark on their journeys with specific ports in mind, only to find that their destinations elude them. However, the ports in which they arrive, while unexpected, prove to be worthwhile. Ranald MacDonald's journey, unlike the typical sequence, begins, literally, in shipwreck and ends with a peaceful voyage. Initially, the result of MacDonald's attempt to sail to Japan seems in line with Horace's warning to Virgil: "*Audax omnia perpeti / Gens humana ruit per vetitum nefas*...(Brashly challenging every law / Mankind plunges ahead into forbidden things)" (qtd. in Blumenberg 11, 106). MacDonald persists in his plans to explore "forbidden" Japan, despite rumours that it is closed to foreigners, punishable by death. He plans to do, literally, what Blumenberg describes metaphorically as one "...who leaves home and heritage behind in order to found his life on the naked nothingness of the leap overboard" (78). He stages his own shipwreck and washes up on Japan's shores, is shunned by its people, and is then imprisoned.

While MacDonald is curious to explore the whole of Japan, he has a specific agenda that motivates his journey: He wants to travel to the City of Yes, which was mapped out and referred to by a much earlier explorer. His imprisonment quickly curtails that plan, and he spends considerable time living a very limited existence. However, he eventually befriends an unnamed Captain who is responsible for his maintenance while in captivity. Through this friendship, a linguistic exchange begins, which eventually blossoms into something much larger. The narrator retells the first story that MacDonald hears

in Japan, and then he explains that "This is how MacDonald composed his Japanese dictionary: he traded the language, word by word, story after story" (190). He has a similar affect on his prison guards, and they on him. His cell "...remained bright enough to read in, and for this he asked a guard for each of his possessions...So MacDonald described a book, each cover, the size and weight of a dictionary, then another, and he began teaching his guards how to read...On his trips to visit the Captain, MacDonald asked questions. He asked one question of each man he met and pieced together the Captain's house and language, one room at a time" (192, 193). In time, MacDonald's influence spreads outside of the prison walls as well, and he is visited by a mathematician who travels great lengths to converse with him. His cell eventually becomes a place of linguistic and cultural exchange for many others:

> In Nagasaki, in a partitioned prison, seven feet by nine, MacDonald constructed a city of language. He fashioned this imaginary place with outstretched hands, explaining new words and phrases to those students who entered his small room. The dimensions changed depending on their individual needs and where their conversations travelled (275).

Even the prison guards, during these exchanges, no longer see a foreign threat, but describe his face as a "...white page that seemed filled with written characters"(278). This signals that they recognize him as another complex human being and even ascribe an aspect of their own culture onto him: calligraphy characters. MacDonald never arrives at the elusive City of Yes; he is eventually freed to a passing American ship to start another sea voyage. The journey he had planned, which motivated his own shipwreck, never comes to pass. However, through his imprisonment, MacDonald arrives at an entirely different port – one

that builds tolerance where there was hostility and allows languages and cultures to be exchanged.

The narrator embarks for Japan not so much for the dream of financial success, which is often the motivation for both seafaring and emigration, but for another self-serving cause: the allure of the "conquering hero" among the exotic. Even before he leaves Canada, the narrator recognizes that "The traveller desires, above all else, the chance to see and hoard Japan for himself, as if could wrap the Orient up inside a *bento* lunch box and bring it home to eat in small, exotic portions. Of course, this was the mythical Asian Discovery, and the reason I was ready to avert my eyes whenever I caught sight of another *gaijin* – foreigner – in a crowded subway" (15). After arriving in Japan, he continues to try to turn a blind eye to any Western influence and seek, as he sees, "the real Japan." His friend, Endo, tells him that he is not original in this quest: "Endo dismissed my preoccupation with 'discovery' as the most common obsession he had observed in a long line of English teachers. Each one of us wanted to claim Japan, he said, as if a whole country, in all its depth and complexity, was either a prize to win or a riddle to solve. We all aspired to be conquering heroes..." (167, 168). This naïve quest aside, the narrator does take several steps that allow him to become more familiar with the subtleties of Japanese culture, instead of a romanticized, postcard version.

The narrator's decision to learn the language opens his eyes to many previously unrecognized aspects of Japanese society: "At eight months the whole planet changed. A framework swung into existence as if I could suddenly piece

the language together" (116). Through language, he gradually learns to recognize other cultural subtleties. For example, his Japanese teacher and others in the community share ancient stories and myths with him that influence current Japanese culture and language, and he learns a different way of approaching communication. For example, when the narrator and Endo share their interest in Ranald MacDonald with a university professor, he listens, then asks them, "…but who was this MacDonald?" The narrator contemplates this question, which he has learned is a characteristically indirect way of finding out needed answers: "This was a better question, I thought, than asking us about our reasons for looking for him…Eventually the conversation would have edged toward something else: not why MacDonald had come, but why *I thought* he'd come. My theory – whatever that was – would give her my own biography" (298).

The narrator's quest remains largely a fantasy rather than the journey he experiences; he never catches a glimpse of the mysterious geisha and can't escape the infiltration of the West. However, his flexibility and curiosity lead him to a different, more realistic port. At the end of the novel, however, he emphasizes that it is not the port, but the journey, that is of importance: "As much as I'd wanted to discover some *thing*, or some place, I think I've given up on that illusion. These days…I'm more interested in the journey than the destination" (326). Blumenberg discusses a similar idea, based on a treatise by the Marquise du Chatelet, who urges one "…not to spend time caulking the ship when he could already be at sea, enjoying the pleasures to be found there" (35). Though neither

MacDonald nor the narrator reach their intended port, they are nonetheless enriched by the journeys they undertake.

The Italian-Canadian community in *Drowning in Darkness* is described as a group that is suspended in a permanent state of shipwreck. After having left their land of origin, Italy, and journeyed to Canada, the desired 'reaggregation' that motivated their emigration couldn't be farther from the reality. Instead, they are shipwrecked: ruined, powerless, and silenced. Blumenberg, based on an 1876 speech by Du Bois-Reymond, aptly describes those shipwrecked parties for whom survival – not the journey or the port – has become their main preoccupation:

> "We may henceforth…feel like a man who would otherwise helplessly sink, were it not that he clings to a plank that barely holds him above water. In a choice between the plank and going under, the advantage is decidedly on the side of the plank." The imaginative character…can be described as a "nautical accommodation" or, in a more recent mode, "living with shipwreck." One has to be prepared to be borne along on the sea indefinitely; no one talks any more about voyages and courses, landings and harbors. (73)

Likewise, this community shows little hope that their situation – financial, social, or

otherwise – will change, as it has been this way for generations. Instead, it continues on in this marginalized state in survival mode, scrambling for the necessities of life in crowded "Dagotown" and in the mines.

The connection between this ethnic community – the majority of whom work in the mines – and seafaring and shipwreck is made repeatedly by Oliva. From the first lines of the novel, this comparison is used to emphasize, like seafaring, the risky nature of the mining environment: "There is a darkness inside

a mountain that is unlike the night, another world where methane swirls next to the coal face like a warm current in a black sea. The gas seeps through mine-shafts and tunnels, marbling both rock and air. It seduces a miner to sleep, to dream, to abandon life" (7). He goes on to describe the character of Celi like a sailor: "And through this fog, through currents of methane, dust and stone, Celi steers the curtain like a sail, one hand on the tarp's mast, the other on his pick, clearing rooms with clean, straight lines...With invisible breakers of methane and dust billowing in front of him, Celi sails his men away, through the mountain's moonless darkness" (8, 9). Also, many men literally drown in the mine, Oliva describes, by inhaling methane and then rolling into shallow puddles. In fact, it is in this same manner that Celi is found at the end of the novel. Also, Sunderd, whose responsibility it is to reassemble shattered bodies after mine explosions, states that he feels "shipwrecked" upon returning to the site of this grim task (169). In remembering his most recent experience, he compares his reaction to a violent drowning: "The day before yesterday wasn't just a simple drowning. He had tried to grasp the water with wide-spread fingers. He had thrashed, gulped down self-propelled water, and sunk to levels nobody would ever forget" (102). Through these, few of many, references to this marginalized community, the mines, and seafaring and shipwreck, Oliva emphasizes in a creative manner the unstable, and often deadly, existence of this marginal group.

The main characters of *Drowning in Darkness*, Sera and Pep, have two very different reactions to living in this environment. Pep, for example, has accepted his life and lot in a liminal position and lives out a repetitive and

unsubstantial existence. However, although his routine seems relatively peaceful, Blumenberg suggests that "…serene calm on the sea is only the deceptive face of something that is deeply problematic" (10). Pep, like Bianca in her teenage years, is stalled at sea – trapped in a liminal state – having never reached a harbour. The monotony of his life can attest to this: Of Pep's marriage to Sera, before she disappears, Oliva writes that "…Pep lived with her for eleven-odd years, treading back and forth between the same family portraits, treading just as redolently between the same dream-worn blankets and the same time-worn memories, like a sleep-walker…" (9). In fact, even as an old man, locals cannot remember him ever being any different:

> Most people were surprised he was still alive, sagging almost everywhere, but still alive. But their memory of him was sagging too, so that when they saw him they propped their recollections up with imaginary poles, and they planted those images beside the little man – squinting as he came out of the bar, his clothes loose, dragging, his hat sweat-stained and thumb-polished – and they saw several Peps, each identical to the others. That may have been their surprise: their tattered memories of the man were exactly who he had aged into. No guessing, no wondering: that was Pep, Pep Rogolino, exactly as they would have imagined him. (10)

This existence, this routine, seems to be sufficient for him, and the meagre wage and precarious stability it offers prevents him from questioning it. While Sera, Sunderd, and others recognize the exploitation that surrounds every aspect of the mine, it is the thing around which Pep's life centres. Pep had begun working in the mine when he was eleven years old, and by the time he marries Sera, she notices that "Not a part of him existed that wasn't created, shaped or callused by a shovel" (42). As an old man, Oliva writes that Pep never missed one day of work

in his life. He stays in this stagnant, fossilized existence from the beginning of the novel to the end, in a time frame that spans his boyhood and youth to his old age. Pep is suspended, having never arrived at any harbour. Herostratus, in one of his *Dialogues of the Dead*, writes of this safe, but futile, position: "It is said that sailors fear most of all calm seas and that they want wind, even at the risk of tempests. In men, passions are the winds that are necessary to put everything in movement, even if they sometimes cause storms and turbulence" (qtd. in Blumenberg 30). Pep's lack of passion, shown by his unhealthy lack of movement, is juxtaposed to Sera's energy, which eventually leads to her 'shipwreck'.

Blumenberg tells the story of Erasmus of Rotterdam, who describes "... a man from Sicily who had undergone shipwreck while carrying a cargo of figs, and another time sits on the beach and sees before him the sea lying gentle and calm, as if wanting to entice him to undertake another voyage. Thereupon he expresses his unseduceability in these words: ... 'I know what you want: you want figs!'" (57). In this instance, the sea itself is portrayed as clever and deceptive, having a will of its own. Sera expresses a similar contempt for the sea itself, who seduced her to leave her home on the Mediterranean with its lies and promises: "Italy was as full of seaside towns as America was of promises. And she'd listened to those promises, it seemed, from the sea's pages, from the sea's lying tongue itself. Yelping like Scylla's barking bay, enticing her to cross the Mediterranean, to leave her home, the sea brought Pep's letters and with them the images and smells of America" (78). The reality of Alberta's Crowsnest Pass seems a far cry from

the promises and expectations of 'America'. While Pep throws himself into the routine of his work, Sera slowly escapes into a dream world:

> The man worked, drank, ate, and slept. It seemed enough for him. The Pass was enough for him. Sera wanted to do more than dream at night. She wanted to give her days more colour than the black and white memories from her past. Everything in the Crowsnest seemed to her so terribly black and white, with varied levels of dusty grey. And all so they could go back to Italy with more money than they'd ever known; it was a fantasy she'd long since abandoned. Instead, she grasped for other dreams. Most days she doubted they would ever leave. Most nights she woke amazed she was still here. It seemed every night she stole the blankets from Pep and dreamed them back from the black market by morning. (81)

As quoted above, a sailor wants wind – passion – even at the risk of tempest. Sera's passion and her desperate need for more create internal tempests, in the form of dreams, which eventually take over her life. Even Pep refers to her vigorous nightly adventures as "Sera's tempests" (67). While these dreams begin as nightly escapes, they eventually seep into her daytime hours as well, and in this manner she escapes displacement and the physical and emotional starkness of her environment. It is only upon her death – or 'shipwreck' – that she is able to begin her voyage home: As Sera steps into the mine, and the methane seduces her to sleep, "She hears the ropes tightening, pulling row-boats that creak their way through tunnels. And her sleep, coloured with dreams, draws her home" (179).

Unlike the typical images of danger, uncertainty, and risk associated with seafaring and water, *Drowning in Darkness* also contains passages in which liquids fulfill a more positive, cleansing role. For example, the women from Bagnara, Italy, or *Bagnarote* – to whom Sera is sometimes compared – are

rumoured to have the gift of sight and other mythical powers. It is believed that have the ability to cleanse a man through the act of urination:

> Everyone is Calabria knew the proverb *If you are unlucky you must go to Bagnara*. There, the women could read the swirls of a man's future by spilling olive oil into pots of boiled water. The Bagnarota then cleansed him of his unlucky past by laying him out on his back, squatting over him and urinating. After that, nothing bad would ever happen to him, or, as some said, nothing worse. Their sea would be as calm as oil. (76)

In this case, one form of liquid – urine – has the power to cleanse ill fortune and cause the calming of another potentially lethal liquid: the sea. Sera is, likewise, compared to a Bagnarota by her ability to cleanse Sunderd of the horror of his post-explosion experiences through the act of sex, which carries with it the exchange of bodily fluids. Their brief sexual encounter takes place in the wash-house by the mine, which is where Sunderd had previously been forced to piece together the shattered corpses of the post-explosion miners. Of Sera's perspective, Olive writes that "The whole time she thought about how the Bagnarote were said to pee on men. For a price, they could shed misfortune from a man and cleanse him from his past" (166). Sunderd, who had previously felt crippled in the wash-house and had subsequently become a hermit, is now cleansed of the weight of this negative experience:

> Afterward, even without Sera on top of him, Sunderd felt he'd escaped…He brought his left hand up to his nose to smell her but that too was gone. The floor, its dust and all the ancient grit from a miners' wash-house clouded whatever bits of Sera had stuck to his skin. But suddenly those things didn't matter. Sunderd turned from the window and walked over to the nearest sink. He picked up a bar of soap and, without hurry, washed his hands under a cool stream of water. (170)

In these instances, fluids – particularly those of the body – are portrayed as cleansing rather than threatening. They hold the power to prevent 'shipwreck', both physically and mentally.

As clearly portrayed in these various examples, after an immigrant experiences 'separation' and 'liminality', he/she is not "… in a stable state once more…" having "… rights and obligations of a clearly defined and 'structural' type." There is no 'reaggregation' as described by Turner and VanGennep, and no easy ladder to status elevation and quick financial success. Instead, the reality that immigrants face is closer to the experiences of seafaring: Some find a peaceful harbour of sorts, although not necessarily the one they intended. Some slowly drift or remain suspended in a liminal state, waiting for the wind, and some are overcome by tempests and succumb to shipwreck. Whatever the outcome may be, the processes and experiences of immigration are far more unpredictable and dynamic than either the fantasy of the 'American Dream' or VanGennep's clear-cut sequence.

Chapter Three

Italian-Canadian Literature in Canada

I have, to this point, examined the processes of immigration and the experiences of Italian-Canadian immigrants in Canada in comparison to VanGennep's three stages in a rite of passage and Blumenberg's seafaring images and metaphors. This method of analysis functions on a larger scale as well, as many parallels may also be drawn between Italian-Canadian literature as a whole and VanGennep's sequence, with a particular focus on the 'liminal' phase. Firstly, liminality's trademark ambiguity is ever-present, as this is a literature that is neither clearly defined nor easily categorized. Secondly, many of the other aforementioned characteristics of liminality are also relevant when discussing the literature as a whole. These include a stripping of status, a defying of normal or previous classifications, and being excluded, silenced, and made invisible. As ethnic literature, it is also likely to be re-named or de-named. Despite its seemingly disadvantaged position, it undoubtedly contains 'powers of the weak' and has the ability to subvert established Canadian norms. Also, its position from the margins affords a certain freedom, and it offers new, fresh possibilities, configurations, and ideas. Finally, like the analysis just completed on individual characters in the novels, images and metaphors of seafaring and shipwreck are relevant in relation to the larger spectrum of Italian-Canadian literature as well; they describe a complex literature which contains a multiplicity of definitions, expressions, and possibilities.

After writers or their ancestors have emigrated from Italy to Canada – the first, important 'separation' phase – they find themselves in a peculiar "betwixt and between" position; their work no longer falls simply under the title of 'Italian literature', nor does it seem to fit in with the literary canon of their new country, which in this case is Canada. Indeed, liminality's characteristic 'ambiguity' enshrouds both ethnic writers and their literatures. Antonio D'Alfonso, in his essay "Unmeltable Ethnics," explains the difficulty in, first, precisely defining an ethnic identity:

> When in 1981 Fulvio Caccia and I chose to do an anthology of Italian/Quebecois writers, [the] lack of ethnic visibility in the names of men and women became a large thorn in our research…Easy to say that Marco Fraticelli and Mary Melfi are Italian names but what a shock it was to discover that behind names such as Carole David and Ken Norris there hid a Fioramore and a Castellano! A name is simply not enough to make you an identifiable Italian…What about the complex question of birth? Who is more Italian, the boy born in Italy of Scottish background, or the Calabrese girl born in Windsor? …Here again, identity cannot be determined by place of birth …Add to these pitfalls the troublesome debate on language: Does the fact that my mother and father do not speak a word of English make them less Canadian citizens than a colleague from Drummondville who knows only French?...No, language cannot by itself encompass all the dimensions of one's ethnic identity…With issues of identity, as soon as you believe that you have finally come to an understanding so as to what makes a man a man, a woman a woman, and an ethnic group and ethnic group and not another, you suddenly find yourself hitting your head against the iron gratings of form versus content. (151, 152)

Pinning down and defining ethnicity in general is not straightforward; likewise, it is also difficult to do so for ethnic writers and their literatures. Italian-Canadian literature is not, as its blanketing name suggests, one united body representing the same themes, history, language, and perspectives. Pasquale Verdicchio, in "The

Borders of Writing," insists that "...no group is reduceable to any particular set of themes and modalities...And because the backgrounds of the authors are very different, we cannot be representative of the same stage in Italian Canadian writing. We are a stageless formation of dissimilar poetics offering a multipolar critique of our Canadian and Italian realities" (37, 38). Verdicchio later suggests that the effect and outcome of displacement create a reality that prevents the formation of a unified, solidified identity: "The experience of displacement reveals itself as a plurality of tensions that creates a diversity of definitions in constant motion, toward and away from any readily applicable identity" (90). Although the title 'Italian-Canadian literature' appears concise and uniting, its definition, and the definition of its authors, remains ambiguous, multifaceted, and complex.

Italian-Canadian literature, as an ethnic literature, often defies normal or previous classifications and is, therefore, stripped of status in the eyes of the dominant cultures. As this literature is no longer considered 'Italian', as it may have if the writer hadn't emigrated, and it is not considered by many to be 'Canadian', it does not enjoy the recognition and status that it may have had under either of the aforementioned titles. Like Bianca's mother in *The Lion's Mouth*, there are some who resist the ambiguous, ambivalent, and often unrecognized status that immigrant writers and their literatures experience. Pasquale Verdicchio discusses a group of post-1968 intellectuals who migrated to North America and mainly work as professors in Italian departments. "This group," he explains, "usually writes in Italian and has always insisted on its Italian identity

rather than identify as 'immigrant Italian'" (29). They, among others, resist the stripping of status that comes with being associated with an ethnic identity and literature. However, for those who do not want to live and work in a perpetually divided state and, instead, accept the 'immigrant' part of their identity and writing, the stripping of status goes hand in hand with another characteristic of liminality: exclusion.

The absence of ethnic literature in Canada's literary canon is not due to the lack of production on the part of ethnic writers. For a nation that boasts of its multicultural tolerance, why is there so little ethnic writing appearing in Canadian anthologies with Margaret Atwood and Margaret Laurence? According to several critics, it is exactly the guise of the 'cultural mosaic' that allows for this imbalance of power in the literary and other realms. Pasquale Verdicchio, for example, illustrates this point in his essay, "A Non Canon":

> A canon is a strategic construct by which societies define tradition and outline their interests in cultural terms. Canonical reverence further delineates the distinction between what is of value to a culture and what is not. It establishes a binary qualitative relationship between the canon and what is excluded from it. It allows control over the texts produced within a society and guides their interpretation. It establishes their value... In Canada, minority literatures are institutionally supported with the scope of projecting the image of an ethnically rich and diverse society, or what has come to be called the "cultural mosaic." The presence of minority, ethnic or immigrant writers is tolerated and encouraged, if it fulfils certain thematic prerequisites by which it is easily identifiable as a product of an ethnically challenged person, and which of course unerringly relegates it to the margins of so-called mainstream culture. (104)

In addition to being generally marginalized, the 'token' minority literature that is acknowledged is unfortunately often one that reflects the expectations of mainstream culture and lacks a critical resonance. Others have to try to find other alternative avenues for expression and means of resisting these exclusory practices.

Exclusion is not something that is only exercised by faceless critics and those high up the ladder of publishing houses, but something that is sometimes bred by other ethnic and non-ethnic writers. For example, William Anselmi, in his essay "Displacing the Shadow: Is Ethnic Poetics a Beautiful Wor(l)d?," points out the fact that "...even in its reprint in 1996, Margaret Atwood's anthology of Canadian literature, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, refuses to acknowledge the multiplicity factorization, the polyphonic of Canadian literary production" (542,543). In what is viewed by many as the Bible of Canadian literature, the complete absence of ethnic representation is noteworthy. Anselmi quotes a review by critic Scott Reid that appears in the April 10, 1999 edition of the National Post, in which Atwood claims that "...she had excluded some domestic authors because the themes they explored were simply not relevant to her thesis, and all Canadian immigrant authors because it seems...dangerous to talk about *Canadian* patterns of sensibility in the work of people who entered and/or entered-and-left the country at a developmentally late stage of their lives" (543). Here, in an anthology that is revered as a cornerstone of Canadian Literature, representing the diversity of Canada's population is not attempted or even acknowledged as being 'Canadian'. However, it is not only mainstream,

Anglophone writers that can be exclusory; Verdicchio, speaking of institutionalized multiculturalism, describes how it requires "...a specific set of themes of a writer in order to be qualified as 'ethnic'. A failure to conform to prescribed ethnic formulas leaves some writers marginalized to an even greater degree, due to their double exclusion from both the 'official' and 'ethnic' categories" (18). It is precisely this exclusion, which emanates from both the mainstream and ethnic realms, that perpetuates another aspect of liminality: silence and invisibility.

Silence, and therefore invisibility, is perpetuated, in many cases, by a denial of history and the pressure of assimilation. Verdicchio, for example, explains how many who emigrate to Canada assume a silent, invisible position before ever leaving their country of origin, as the reality that motivates this move does not fit into the 'official' version of national history:

> The major obstacle to a full appreciation of Italian North American writing, both internal and external to the larger communities it encompasses, is the lack of historicization. While some critics suggest that it is a matter of functioning in an environment that offers no tradition, it is important to stress that no hyphenated writer emerges *tabula rasa* from the oyster shell of expatriation...The cultures of expatriates may often have been deemed secondary to the official culture of their land or origin, and may have indeed remained un-expressed due to the oppressive nature of national compromise. As such, immigrants, upon arrival in their new home, were/are forced to make a choice which, more often than not, dictates that they must once again suppress their own culture in order to embrace the culture of their host country. (34)

Likewise, Francesco Loriggio refers to this same denial and suppression when he states that "The silence of the critic's immigrant parents or grandparents is complete" (19). The push for survival, in every sense, must have made

assimilation – and therefore silence – seem the only realistic option for previous generations. This pressure may have been particularly keen before the 'cultural mosaic' notion became popular and politically correct. However, although Canada currently espouses a much more open policy on ethnicity, the same process of denial and assimilation may still be seen today but wearing a different mask.

Silence is also propagated by the illusion that ethnic groups, under the right of freedom of expression, are being heard and therefore play an integral part in Canada's culture and society. The reality, as Verdicchio mentions above, is that often ethnic expression is used to fill the cultural mosaic prerequisite and then quickly relegated to the margins. Loriggio explains this attitude as "You assimilate first and then speak your peace. And when you do, you can question everything but the axioms and theorems which establish assimilation as a premise..." (11). What results, then, is silence, as what is heard after trickling through the filters that are in place is not any kind of true expression of self or history. As literature plays a key role in cultural expression and development, the exclusion of ethnic literatures, and subsequent silence, is neither innocent nor harmless. Anselmi and Gouliamos describe the result of the polarization between national literatures and ethnic writing: "This exclusion denies for all future generations, and for history, one of the means of self-representation and identity. Thus, a particular manipulation is manifested in the nomadic experience, one where history is denied and/or rewritten in favour of capital's cannibalization of the subject's consciousness..."(15). Without a voice regarding these key points,

the domination and hollow expression described by these intellectuals will continue to be the voice of ethnicity in Canada.

A similar silencing and white-washing effect takes place when certain, select members within Italian-Canadian communities, or any other ethnic community, claim to represent the community as a whole. Is such cases, the history and culture that these 'spokespersons' represent silences and makes invisible the multiplicity of other histories and linguistic and cultural backgrounds present there. According to Verdicchio, this "... 'strategy of containment' involves a choice by which only a selected (non-representative) sample is allowed to speak for/from a particular ethnic group. The end result, of course, is one of ethnicism or culturalism, in other words an external imposition of identity that denies past and present history in favor of abstractions such as nationhood and nationality" (16,17). Anselmi and Gouliamos speak of a similar situation in media representations, when those in positions of power hand-pick a 'representative' from the community who works to maintain existing power structures, or "The Lone Bard Symptom." In situations such as these, representatives play on emotions and common community ties, such as religion, to gain sympathy, credibility, and legitimacy, while actually manipulating members of their own community and the public at large. The position of the 'representative' is self-serving and deceptive, as the community is deprived of voicing its heterogeneous nature and the public continues to see what it stereotypically expects (Anselmi & Gouliamos 58 – 60). Representatives such as these, in literature and otherwise, work to maintain existing power structures that

are a result of institutionalized multiculturalism. This is just one way in many that Italian-Canadian literature is excluded, silenced, and made invisible within its own communities and in within Canadian society at large.

Like Turner's initiates, Italian-Canadian immigrants, writers, and their literature may be re-named or de-named. This effect often has to do with flattening a complex and diverse set of peoples, writers, and literatures to an easy, reductive label. This point is illustrated by various writers and critics within Italian-Canadian communities. Pasquale Verdicchio, for example, describes how dominant society seeks to rob ethnicity, and therefore its literature, of its legitimacy by reducing it to another 'ism'. He begins with a quote by Giovanni Arrighi:

> "Whenever the political claim (and/or definition by others) is less than that of state sovereignty, we tend to call this group an 'ethnic group,' whatever the basis of the claim, be it common language, common religion, common skin color, or fictive common ancestry." Ethnic is thus a subset of the minor condition described above, or a condition necessary to it, thereby also representative of a threat to the dominant. In order to neutralize the expression of the ethnic, in other words to return it to the status described by Arrighi, it has been necessary for official cultures to institutionalize the term, and "circumscribe it by time," as another cultural "-ism" – ethnicism. (16)

This tendency is seen pertaining specifically to literature as well, as previously discussed. Re-naming ethnicity as "another cultural '-ism'" works as a divisive technique to separate the ethnic and the mainstream. This makes it easier to relegate its literature and other means of expression to the margins.

Anselmi and Gouliamos also discuss this tendency, which is emphasized in a review of *Roman Candles*, the aforementioned anthology of Italian-Canadian

poetry, by critic Laurie Ricou. Ricou states that "…most of these Roman Candles flicker faintly, don't explode or illuminate, don't light up a world. As a group I found the poems more valuable as cultural statement, than as poetry: there is a group of I-can (as they're more punningly called) poets spread across the country…"(78). Ricou de-names this literature by denying its status as "poetry" and reducing it, instead, to a "cultural statement." Her choice of words, in addition to the patronizing "I-can" pun, immediately lumps the poets and their works into a realm of harmless, and powerless, amateurs. This, according to Anselmi and Gouliamos, is to render this literature non-threatening: "It is quite clear that Ricou's words meant to shed the light about a *pretence*, a staging of poetics as the *different*, the other that Canadian canons could not encompass, since, it is obvious, this poetry collection was, first of all, a political threat" (79). Through comments and criticism such as these, we may see the potential force in literature, and therefore the need by some to de-name and re-name in order to diffuse the threat of ethnic writers and their works.

There is also considerable reaction to the de-naming and re-naming that occurs when an author and his/her literature receives the title of 'immigrant'. There are some who will go to considerable lengths to avoid said title, such as the aforementioned group of post-1968 intellectuals. They resist this re-/de-naming by insisting only on their Italian identity and refusing to acknowledge the 'immigrant' title (Verdicchio 29). With the often suffocating and homogenizing effect that comes with being de-named of one's background of origin and re-named the general term 'immigrant', it is not inconceivable as to why these

intellectuals would take this stance of rejection. Verdicchio states that "The very label of 'immigrant' limits cultural influence to the moment of arrival, while giving no recognition to the 'emigrant' portion of the equation and its historical and cultural baggage" (91, 92). The 'immigrant' title does not acknowledge the limitless number of possible backgrounds and histories that it covers and often relegates its bearer simply to the position of the 'other'. D'Alfonso also acknowledges the insufficiency of these terms in expressing the identities of those re-/de-named in this manner: "To limit ethnicity to a country is to belittle the highest component of its meaning, that is ethnicity has developed into such a complex transborder experience that the terms *emigrant* and *immigrant* can no longer contain it" (19).

Italian-Canadian writers feel the weight of being re-named as 'immigrants' as well, which is a term that is often tied to tired repeated themes and stereotypes. However, there are a growing number who buck against this weight. Verdicchio refers to authors such as Marco Micone, Antonio D'Alfonso, and Dore Michelut when he states: "The work of these authors is a response to the external forces that have constructed their subjectivity as immigrants, and represents an attempt to unveil those same forces" (22). He gives, as an example, a scene from a play by Micone, *Babele*, which highlights the problem of silence and the communicative difficulties that immigrants face both in the home and community. In this scene, a father boasts to a Quebecois visitor about his son's ability to speak English and French like a native but complains that he has forgotten Italian. However, he delivers this speech in his own regional dialect,

which the listener cannot understand (22). Micone, and other writers of his awareness, uses his work to highlight the complexity that is veiled behind the 'immigrant' term. In this manner, we may see that re-naming and de-naming does not have to be an oppressive force but can also be an avenue for autonomous expression.

Like Turner's example of the court jester, Italian-Canadian literature, in its position as a minority literature in Canada, contains certain 'powers of the weak' and has the ability to subvert dominant societal norms. William Anselmi, in "Displacing the Shadow," suggests that this subversive power springs from a "surplus" on the part of the immigrant:

> ...[I]n studying Italian Canadian literature, what seemed at best an analysis of reciprocity, that is of cultural exchange (between host country, departing country and composite group of immigratory realities) now becomes a surplus. A superstructure surplus, of course, investing the lifeworld with a context-bound ideological construction. And, in being so defined, it is potentially, irremediably subversive. Ethnocultural artistic representations, such is the Italian Canadian experience, are "naturally" embedded into a discourse of opposition to the dominant discourse we have indicated. It might not be apparent at a surface level, where most would like to relegate it to a variety of recuperable discourses, such as: nostalgia, assimilation, intergenerational conflict, unresolvable displacement, subaltern manifestations, heroic constructions, work-ethics sacrifice, etc. In all of those cases...the lack of connecting mechanisms work precisely to mask the "surplus" reality...(542)

One of the places in which this subversive power, motivated by a "surplus reality," commonly appears is in the realm of language. Approaching English from a position other than mother-tongue, within the context of another culture, seems to have an unquestionably subversive effect; this effect is made manifest in the literature of Italian-Canadians authors who write in English.

Pasquale Verdicchio sums up this reshaping of the English language by saying: "Today, the languages of colonialism are themselves being colonized by the very elements they once sought to subdue" (16). English, it seems, is not a hallowed ground that is untouchable and impenetrable. Verdicchio goes on to explain the role that Italian-Canadian writers have in this subversive process:

> With the acquisition of a language of expression, with the opening provided by language as an antagonistic tool, Italian Canadian writers have been able to turn the English language back toward those who call it their mother tongue. By stressing latinate vocabulary, by the insertion of Italian syntactical forms, and by the inclusion of linguistic elements that represent the utterances of immigrant culture, these writers have altered the semantic field of English, thereby denying expected meaning. The expression of Italian Canadian "silence" becomes Anglo Canada's interpretative silence. (17)

This may occur simply when a writer inserts words and phrases from Italian standard or dialects into English discourse, or with other, more openly oppositional techniques as well. Verdicchio uses a work by Antonio D'Alfonso as an example. D'Alfonso, in *The Other Shore*, declares "I shall no longer write in English," but speaks instead of an emancipated English, in which "The action and the verb possess a morality of their own, which rises from within…" and "…the artistic noun – known nothing of morality…exists per se before our eyes naked, without pessimism or optimism, as if it were created by a mathematical force beyond our control"(qtd. in Verdicchio 20).

This subversion may also happen unintentionally, as in the case of Mrs. Mazzin in *The Lion's Mouth* or Pep in *Drowning in Darkness*, as they both use English words in unconventional contexts and create their own meanings and idioms. D'Alfonso explains that even when writers try to avoid subversive

techniques, they often emerge in immigrant writing. He suggests that Italian-Canadian poets gravitate naturally toward modernist writing because of all of the contradictory forces working within and without them, rather than traditionalist writing. As for those who do attempt to adhere to traditionalism, D'Alfonso still insists that their writing hides a "muffled scream," betraying their subversion (28). Likewise, Anselmi also suggests that a critical reading may be taken even from the most neutralized texts, which betrays the intended neutrality: "For even a *Lives of the Saints* (Nino Ricci), however normalizing its diktat: in re-presenting intentionally stereotypical characterizations of culture, environment and 'presumable lives' entices its ghostext and the utopic substratus to alter, indefinitely, the neutralizing reading. What is made available, in critical reading, is the aftermath and spoils of a Globalizing phagotycization of the different" (Displacing 548). It seems that subversion, either linguistic or otherwise, is an essential part of ethnic writing. Whether or not Italian-Canadian authors intend to incorporate this aspect into their writing seems secondary; their "surplus" reality incorporates itself into the text regardless.

Along with its ability to subvert, or "gibe at the king," Italian-Canadian literature, in its marginal position, also opens a realm of new possibility, where fresh configurations and ideas may arise. Immigrants and their literatures have the ability to render a nation's identity both dynamic and malleable, despite how fixed or homogenous some might insist it is. Pasquale Verdicchio calls minority literature "…the moment of challenge, the point where cultures touch and mingle, where they define their positions; the moment that both unifies and distances

populations of a land" (24). Its ambiguous nature – a chief characteristic of liminality – allows for greater flexibility and creativity than those literatures which are expected to adhere to a stereotypical 'Canadian' definition. Even in a "betwixt and between" position – the interstices of Canadian culture and society – minority groups and their literatures hold the possibility of communication and exchange with the dominant culture: "Subaltern groups, displaced as they are within an official or dominant culture, must negotiate a communicative middle-ground within that relationship. As a cultural interstice, this represents the ground for hybridization and hegemonic commerce"(Verdicchio 39). Despite its liminal position, Italian-Canadian literature, and other ethnic literatures, can and do have a profound effect on dominant cultures, even paving the way for a truer form of multiculturalism. Verdicchio suggests that the production of Italian-Canadian literature "…has introduced a range of possibilities into English which is potentially freeing for all users of the language. Their work, and that of other cultural groups within the Canadian context, goes to facilitate the dialectic between determinism and freedom by which a truly multicultural society may emerge" (26).

It is also in this interstitial state that minority writers have the potential to free history from its 'official' version and reclaim their own unwritten past, which may have been ignored or erased by both the country of origin and the host country. By claiming one's history, one also holds the possibility for influencing the present and the future. According to William Anselmi, "Italian Canadian textual production partakes in the process of redefining culturally the host and

country of provenance. Redefining culturalizations, has as its premise positing the historical of subjectivities as its mechanism of representation. Ethnocultural representations so definable, lead to the formulation of a different space by which to interpret normative imperical categories, such as Globalization"(Displacing 544,545). In this manner, reclaiming one's history also allows for a critical understanding of one's present. Also, as previously discussed, an erasure of history plays a large part in excluding and silencing ethnic groups; to reclaim this history is a step toward genuine self-expression. Antonio D'Alfonso also makes the connection between claiming one's past in order to emancipate one's future, all within the literary realm: "The literary space is a laboratory where we study the fragments of our past and where a future built to our scale shall be designed" (31, 32). This reclaiming of a lost history, and the repercussions it has on the future, is another way that Italian-Canadian literature, from its marginal position, may have a hand in creating new possibilities and configurations in both Canada and Italy.

Just as an analysis of individual immigrant characters lends itself to images of shipwreck and seafaring, so does Italian-Canadian literature as a whole. However, in this case, the danger lies less in the tumultuous shipwreck than it does in the slow sinking of staticity. Antonio D'Alfonso states that "As soon as stasis sets in, the outcome is death. Life…is the energy derived from the effort of uniting two similar magnetic poles that gives existence meaning" (40). Therefore, when a writer ignores his/her dual identity and gives into assimilation, it is akin to an internal death – or 'drowning'. Verdicchio's aforementioned group of post-

1968 intellectuals would also fall under this category. They, like Pep, are stranded, still, at sea by their lack of critic and personal awareness: "By repeating official distinctions based on class categorizations to define who is or is not an immigrant, this group re-enforces negative stereotypes of Italian immigrants and presents itself as the only viable and valuable source of Italian culture abroad. This of course effectively discounts the value of much of Italian North American writing in English and other languages"(29). This blatant denial of such an integral part of their identity brings them to a complete standstill on what should be a journey of movement. D'Alfonso suggests, in opposition to "...the morbid lure to stagnation, inactivity and...decomposition," the image of "...a never-rendering spiral of movement..." (41).

These intellectuals, and other immigrants of this mentality, fall prey to a staticity that is equal to those who only live in the past, both falsifying the immigration experience and denying the present. Verdicchio refers, again, to the lack of motion of these kinds of writers, who lack a dynamic aspect to their perspective and work: Firstly, he states that "Writing only in relation to the past, in a nostalgic tone or as a simple recounting of it, is doomed to staticity. The passage of time, a future that becomes present, gives life to writing, whereas the non-passage of time, the contemplation of the past, the denial of regeneration and evolution, denies writing the creativity that it seeks" (90, 91). As for those writers who create and try to resurrect a fictitious past, he describes them as being on the verge of drowning: "Often, Italian Canadian writers turn their backs on their historical selves and founder in an attempt to recuperate an irrecuperable (because

fictitious) past. This fiction has little to offer as a function of the present" (105). In this case, "foundering" implies submergence, a sinking, which will eventually result in shipwreck and drowning. The lack of positive movement associated with 'staticity' and 'foundering' draws attention to these writers' delusional perspective and stunted position regarding their immigrant identity. Another more positive image – one of survival – comes from an interview with Antonio D'Alfonso. He states that the job of Italians "…is to make immigration acceptable. Jewish writers rarely speak of their immigrant experience; they describe the horrors that smothered them throughout history. These horrors became their story…Our story is the story of immigration, adaptation" (54). Like Oliva's yellow spider in the cage of the praying mantises, D'Alfonso points to Italian immigrants' innovation and strong will to survive and adapt. This is also akin to Blumenberg's analogy of building a vessel out of the debris of other shipwrecks: It is hardly ideal. It certainly wasn't the intended or expected voyage, yet Italian immigrants have persisted and formed an integral part of Canada's history and culture.

What of VanGennep's elusive 'reaggregation', or the 'safe port' at the end of the journey? Its equivalent, in literary terms, would be the acceptance – after a challenging, liminal period – of Italian-Canadian literature, and all ethnic literatures, into the revered canon of mainstream Canadian literature. Margaret Atwood, Robertson Davies and Caterina Edwards would appear side by side in anthologies throughout Canada's homes, schools, and universities. Italian-Canadian literature would enjoy an elevated status and be clearly defined, secure

in its position in society and in its identity. However, is this the destination at which Italian-Canadian writers hope to arrive? According to Pasquale Verdicchio, perhaps one idealized canon should not be the goal:

> In an attempt to canonize themselves, Italian Canadians look back to an ideal Other through which to personify their experiences. However, this idealized immigrant embodies a culture that was never its own, the "national" culture of a pretentiously unified Italy…Ironically, the type of canon being constructed for and by some Italian Canadian writers is one that projects itself on an interpretative model that can only hinder its progress, based as it is on predetermined themes and subjects. They are not indicative of the wide range of Italian Canadian experience in Canada but only serve a self-interested desire for stature and a pursuit of narcissistic self-representation. (106)

He suggests, instead, a less homogenous approach, a "non canon," that would allow the multiplicity of differences to flourish. To cling to the ideology of one, unified canon would be, in fact, shipwreck:

> We cannot let ourselves sink under the influence of a unified canon such as Multiculturalism and the Canada Council propose. An unstable, multifaceted approach would better serve us. A non canon would make it impossible to pin down our work through simplistic thematic reviews…A weak canon, a non canon, finds strength not in an oppositional stance but rather in an ambiguous situation of resistance…The non canon's resistance puts into question all positions of dominant subjects so that there can be no movement toward equivalency…An elusive and non-dogmatic approach would be one that better reflects not only our uncertain position as a group but also as individuals in today's world. (107)

Here, Verdicchio speaks again of the strength and the realm of possibility that may be found in the margins rather than in the mainstream. Through his belief that strength might be found in ambiguity, he implies that Italian-Canadian

literature has greater strength in 'liminality' rather than in 'reaggregation', or one, solidified canon.

Most writers and intellectuals agree, however, that Canada's current policy of multiculturalism, or the 'cultural mosaic', is smothering and neutralizing. To linger always at the margins of such a structure may not seem particularly empowering or appealing. Perhaps, then, we can take Verdicchio's suggestion of a 'non canon' and add to it D'Alfonso's proposal that minority expressions skip the official 'multicultural' filter and govern their own expression: "...[W]hen it comes to ethnic democracy, my primary thesis is that without 'experience from the inside' there can never be freedom of speech...The real issue is to allow all minorities methods to produce *en masse* and to control the means of production of their own works of the Imaginary (*l'imaginaire*)" (17). According to D'Alfonso, this claiming of control does not include walking the same tired path already worn by Canada's two dominant cultures. Critical of the fact that ethnic authors are often forced to "work with the crumbs" left by French Quebec and English Canada, he suggests that only real alternative is to "...start from scratch, from a 'naked' world (not to be confused with a 'natural' world). Contrary to what is commonly accepted, it is only by following the second path that ethnic writers will find their own true voice" (59). These, few of many, suggestions are clearly not the only proposed alternatives to institutionalized multiculturalism; like seafaring, there are many routes and potential outcomes. Perhaps, as the narrator suggests in *The City of Yes*, rather than fixating on the destination, there is much yet to be learned in the journey.

Conclusion

Contrary to Canada's 'cultural mosaic' declaration, which implies a larger body composed of small but equally-important pieces, a closer examination suggests that this ideal simply masks an imbalance of power and false representation. Through a critical examination of individual immigration experiences – as represented in the aforementioned novels – and also of the larger

realm of Italian-Canadian literature, a more fitting image of ethnicity in Canada emerges, which is that of the 'threshold'. The characteristics of this 'liminal' position, as it is described by Arnold VanGennep and Victor Turner, are very similar to those experienced in the processes of immigration and displacement. For example, Turner describes in *The Forest of Symbols* how "The subject of passage ritual is, in the liminal period, structurally, if not physically, 'invisible'" (95). This description applies both to the specific example of the Italian-Canadian mining community in *Drowning in Darkness* and, on a larger scale, the position of Italian-Canadian literature as seen through the lense of institutionalized multiculturalism. Likewise, Turner also discusses the re-naming and de-naming that often occurs with initiates: "The same name is very frequently employed to designate those who are being initiated into very different states of life" (95). The characters in these novels also experience this phenomenon by being stripped of the titles of their previous nationalities, being subjected to racial slurs, and even trying to shed their ethnicity by changing names. As well, Italian-Canadian writers and their literatures are often de-named by the blanketing title of 'immigrant' and are relegated to the margins as another '-ism'. These are just a few of many examples of the similarities between 'liminality' and displaced persons and literatures in Canada.

Although Italian-Canadians have clearly experienced many aspects of the liminal phase, they have not subsequently passed into VanGennep's 'reaggregation' phase, where they are supposed to be endowed with new rights, responsibilities, and privileges. Are Italian-Canadians and their literatures, then,

destined to hover in the interstices of Canadian culture and society? Although this literature, much of which reclaims the history and experiences of Italian immigrants in Canada, has not toppled institutionalized multiculturalism, it has made progress against liminality's silence, exclusion, stripping of status, and other marginalizing characteristics. This process began largely in 1978, with the publication of the first anthology of Italian-Canadian poetry written in English, *Roman Candles*. Antonio D'Alfonso speaks hopefully of the beginnings of this break away from silence: "Despite the different literary styles of Italian writers in Canada and Quebec and their divergent views, we begin to hear an 'Italian voice' coming through their works. As a result of this new voice an Italian tradition is being felt in the writing of this land" (30). Francesco Loriggio also recognizes that a polyphony of voices is starting to trickle through the dominant discourse:

> [I]n literary studies the reconstituting of unacknowledged continuities has been to this day the major practical contribution of some of the younger branches of the field – feminist criticism, ethnic or minoritarian studies and research in gay or lesbian writing. Texts previously unread or deemed unworthy of critical recognition have surfaced, and their retrieval or their repositioning vis – a – vis the canon has impacted both on theoretical reflection and on the everyday classroom practice of teaching. (10)

It is worthwhile to note, also, that the appearance of ethnic and minoritarian studies in Universities and other institutions of learning have surfaced by means of their own strength; these are not simply subsets of something larger and more mainstream. While they may not receive the enrolment, attention, and funding of some of the more accepted and traditional fields, they continue to provide an

integral voice regarding the present state and history of minorities in Canada and worldwide.

Another sign of Italian-Canadian literature's growing influence – and therefore a recognition of the influence of the Italian-Canadian people in Canada – is the fact that it has, in more recent years, won awards at provincial and national levels. These authors include Nino Ricci, Fulvio Caccia, Vittorio Rossi, and Peter Oliva. William Anselmi calls the process of awarded recognition "...the artistic text's political placement on the cultural map of power relations," and describes it as a means of subverting globalizing practises (Displacing 546). While Italian-Canadian literature, and other ethnic literatures in Canada, has not leapt from the liminal realm, these examples all point to a slow shift, or subtle movement, within their previously-static and marginalized state.

Antonio D'Alfonso calls on an image of survival and adaptation to describe Italian-Canadian writers in Canada: the chameleon. Contrary to the typical connotation of silence and assimilation that the chameleon evokes, D'Alfonso does not use this image to imply that these ethnic authors change their colours to blend in with the dominant background; rather, he comments on their ability to adapt to and survive in their environment, which allows their voices to be heard beyond the margins and the tired stereotypes portrayed in North America:

> Whether we write in French, English, or Italian, our Italian voice begins to be heard, a voice unlike anything we have ever heard on this continent before. To read an Italian writer working in Canada or the United States of America is not to read a Quebecois, a Canadian, or an American writer. The Italic voices do not follow an identical melody; yet the

> harmonies do not antagonize each other. Perhaps that is why there are as many visions of being Italian as there are Italian writers in North America. In this aspect we are quite faithful to the Italian tradition: the view we depict of the world is personal, as disparate as our diversified works. Our world resembles a mosaic…To describe Italian writers in Quebec, Fulvio Caccia uses the image of the phoenix which rises in the morning from its ashes – presage to birth after death; the present must end in death for the future to come to life…[C]ontrary to Fulvio Caccia, I believe the best image to describe what Italic writers are is not the phoenix, but the chameleon: Death is not necessary, only a change of colour suffices to allow adequate access into the new society. And it is the power of adaptation that will permit us to accomplish the enormous task we have set ourselves…(31, 32)

At this moment in time, referring again to the abovementioned strides that Italian-Canadian authors and their literatures have made, they are indeed characterized by the chameleon as described by D'Alfonso. Theirs is a story of survival, persistence and a growing momentum.

As 'reaggregation', or the 'safe harbour' as described by Blumenberg, is not the present position of Italian-Canadian literature in Canada, nor is it likely the future. It too closely resembles Canada's portrayal of a tolerant, all-inclusive – and ever-elusive – 'cultural mosaic'. In this context, 'reaggregation' pertains to a fantasy, or at least idealized, world, and is unrealistic and likely undesirable as a goal. In this conclusion, I will not propose or feign to know the next leg of this journey or where/if this journey will end. Like the seafaring metaphor, to insist on a fixed course or destination would betray the dynamic and creative spirit of the process. My concluding point will be, instead, the continuing need for a contradictory and oppositional voice. Pier Giorgio Di Cicco, in his introduction to *Roman Candles*, describes those who have grown up with two cultures as being

in a "…fortunate and tragic position…"(qtd. in Verdicchio 9). Bianca, in *The Lion's Mouth*, criticizes her first novel attempt, in which the Italian protagonist is destroyed by the harsh Canadian landscape, for its lack of contradiction (107). Likewise, Mary Douglas explains that the general public's fear of liminal entities "…is a reaction to protect cherished principles and categories from contradiction" (qtd. in Turner, Forest 97). It is a contradictory voice that reveals the multilayered and complex nature of immigration and ethnicity. As well as on a personal level, continuing to provide – as many writers and intellectuals have done – a public contradictory voice will pave a way for an alternative to token multiculturalism. Pasquale Verdicchio says the following of Italian-Canadian authors' position of contradiction against the mainstream:

> …[W]ithin the Italian Canadian group, their salient feature is in their position of contradiction and antagonism. This places them, through language, at the center of the mechanisms of cultural production. The work of these authors is a response to the external forces that have constructed their subjectivity as immigrants, and represents an attempt to unveil those same forces…[T]he antagonism is not only addressed at Canada's construction of their subjectivity but also at Italy's. This declares the immigrant's autonomy from both influences and clears a ground for further cultural activity that speaks of itself and is not merely the mirror of another's image. (22, 23)

In this manner, if there is another 'step' in the sequence, or a new leg in the journey of immigration and displacement, the practice of critical and constructive contradiction will allow Canada and its many ethnic groups to experience a truer and more empowering cultural mosaic.

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